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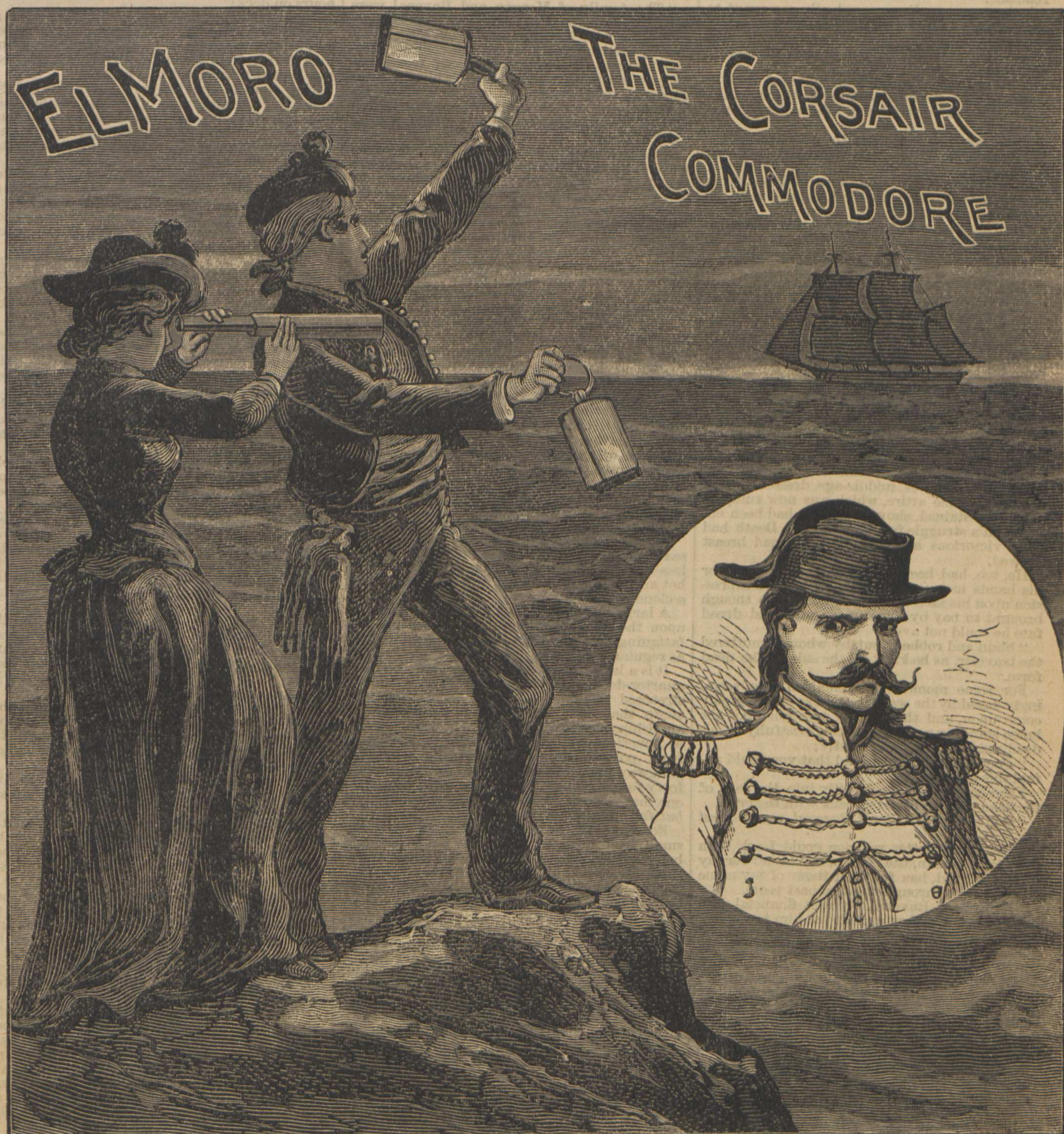
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STEPPING OUT UPON THE EDGE OF THE BLUFF HE WHIRLED THE LANTERNS IN CIRCLES ABOUT HIS HEAD.

El Moro,

The Corsair Commodore;

OR,

THE LION OF THE LAGOON.

A Romance of the Gulf of Mexico and
its Shores Four-score Years Ago.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

CONDEMNED BY THE DEAD.

A MAN is trudging slowly along a forest road in England, all of his worldly possessions hanging at his back in a small bundle, which a stout cane carried over one shoulder upholds.

His garb is travel-stained and worn, and he walks with the air of one who is foot-sore and weary; but his carriage is erect, and his appearance that of one born in refinement, and who wears the stamp of a gentleman.

A young, fearless, handsome face, a superb physique he possesses, and though he has traveled far afoot, his eyes flash brightly, and determination to press on is stamped upon his firm lips.

Suddenly he halts, for his eyes fall upon the form of a human being lying prostrate by the roadside.

It is a man in livery, evidently a servant to some noble, for his horse feeds not far distant.

Approaching him, the young traveler discovers that the man is dead, though his flesh is yet warm.

Bending over him he sees clutched with a death-grip in one hand a large leathern wallet, and in the other a watch and fob-chain and some jewels.

What does it mean? Can the man be a robber flying with his booty, and overtaken by death ere he could escape?

In his side is a wound, the life-blood from which has saturated his clothing and tells the cause of his death.

Securing the wallet and valuables, which he has to force from the stiffening fingers, the young traveler hastens on his way, while from his lips break the words:

"My God! I have a fortune here!"

No longer does he walk now with tired step, and his face has lost its weary look, though the rich blood has fled from it.

A walk of a few hundred paces and he stopped again, while an exclamation of horror broke from his lips.

A turn of the pathway, leading through the forest, brought him suddenly upon another form lying by the roadside, and a horse stood near, apparently unwilling to leave his rider.

At sight of the traveler the horse gave a low neigh of seeming joy, while the young man approached the prostrate form.

It was a man of middle-age, dressed in rich and fashionable attire, which was now rumpled and blood-stained, showing that he had been engaged in a struggle for life, and that Death had been victorious a wound in his broad breast showed.

He, too, had been dead but a short time, for his hands had not grown cold; but the expression upon his face was one of horror, as though brought to bay by some unexpected and dread fate he could not avert.

"Slain and robbed! but by whom?" muttered the traveler, as he knelt by the side of the dead form.

For some moments he remained thus, seemingly dazed by the scenes he had so unexpectedly come upon, and then as his eyes fell upon the horse standing near, and gazing wistfully at his dead master, he said, earnestly:

"Poor dumb brute! would that you could unfold this mystery."

Then he gazed more directly into the face of the dead man and started back with the cry:

"God above! it is Lord Ravenal, my bitterest foe!"

"Oh! what better revenge could I ask than this, for this man, the rival of my father for my mother's hand, has followed those of my name with revenge through all these past years."

"You, Lord Ravenal, brought financial ruin upon my poor father and drove him to suicide. You have persecuted my poor mother, year by year, through revenge, and forced me, in the face of an enemy, to demand a leave of absence from my ship, that I might come home to see her die, for well I know that she cannot last long."

"But, I would not have had you die thus, shot down and robbed upon the highway. No, I would far rather have had you fall by my own right hand in fair combat, that I might avenge the past."

"How strange it is, that the sight of this man, dead as he is, makes me revengeful!"

"The thought is unmanly, and I will— Ha! here come a party of huntsmen!"

As he turned toward a party of horsemen, who

just then leaped a wall, and drew rein at sight of him and the body at his feet, one of them cried out:

"Ho, friends! there has been murder here!"

"Ay, sirs, murder most foul, and it is Lord Ravenal who lies here, while his groom is yonder up the road and also dead," said the young man.

There were a dozen in the party, and they were a number of gentry and their attendants, and they gazed upon the young man with looks that plainly showed suspicion, while one of them responded:

"Lord Ravenal and his servant both slain; but by whom?"

"That I cannot tell you, sir; but I found the one, and in his clutched hands were this wallet and these jewel trinkets, and I took them to hasten on and give the alarm, when I came upon Lord Ravenal here."

"How knew you that it was Lord Ravenal?"

"I have known him since my earliest boyhood, sir."

"You wear the uniform of a royal midddy," continued the spokesman of the party.

"I am a royal midddy, sir."

"Your name, please."

"Neil Morgan."

"Ah, yes, you are the son of widow Morgan, who dwells at the village three leagues from here?"

"I am."

"There was enmity between your family and the Ravens, I believe?" said the spokesman of the party, with increased suspicion in look and tone.

"The family of Morgan and Ravenal were one, sir; but the title fell upon my father's cousin, he who lies here, and they were rivals for my mother's hand, as all the country hereabout knows, and this man at my feet never forgave my mother for discarding him, and for marrying the one she loved, and he has been our bitter foe ever since," and the words were spoken with firmness and a frankness that stamped them as truth.

But those who listened now recalled the young man who, years before, had gone off to sea before the mast, to aid in supporting his widowed mother, and for his noble conduct in saving the lives of a wrecked crew, swimming through a wild sea with a rope to their aid, had been made a midshipman in the royal navy.

But the evidence before them pointed to him as the murderer of his enemy, Lord Ravenal, and his servant, and after a few words together, the party decided to arrest him and carry him to the village prison to await his trial.

"Oh, sirs! this will kill my poor mother, for even now she is lying ill and I came home to bid her a last farewell ere I started upon a long voyage to American waters," cried the young midshipman.

"You should have thought of your mother before you committed the double murder, young man," was the heartless response, and the almost broken-hearted youth was securely bound and marched off to prison, charged with a crime which caused the gallows to rise up before him in all its grim terror and cruel shame.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONVICT CRAFT.

THE scene changes to the Tropics, and upon a sea that glimmers like glass under the breathless stillness of an afternoon, when the air is hot and heavy, and the sky brazen and without a cloud.

A large vessel rolls lazily and monotonously upon the swell, as though the movement was fatiguing, and her sails flap with each motion as regularly as the tap of a drum.

It is a large vessel, with an awning over her quarter-deck, and beneath its friendly shade are stretched several hammocks, so inviting to a siesta that each one holds an occupant, and amidst a peculiar kind of iron lattice-work, or covering, if I can so express it, stretching from port to starboard, excepting a narrow gangway upon either side, and in width some forty feet, forming a huge cage, as it were, and one that was not built for feathered songsters, but for human beings.

Fore and aft in this grating, or cage, are small iron gates, each strongly padlocked, and before which paces with measured tread a sentinel, his musket at a shoulder-arms.

In the center of the cage is a large hatchway, leading below decks, but no one is visible within the locked inclosure.

Forward of this seeming prison-pen are the crew of the vessel, a score of men, engaged in playing cards, while, forming another group, are as many soldiers off duty, and also whiling away the sultry hours in games of various kinds.

Aft, an officer paces to and fro, his steps mechanical, and his air that of one whose thoughts are busy and who cares little for storm or calm.

A helmsman stands leaning against his wheel, awaiting the coming of a breeze and his call to duty, and seated in the companionway is a mulattress engaged in some fancy work, while aft of the "prison-pen" a huge negro is asleep at full length upon the deck.

Beneath the quarter-deck awning four ham-

mocks are stretched, and, as before stated, each held an occupant, who had been lulled to sleep by the motion of the vessel rocking upon the lazy swell.

Suddenly one of the four sleepers arose and glanced about him, and then walked toward the officer of the deck, who still kept up his monotonous pace to and fro.

"Well, Brainard, not a breath of air yet," he said, in the blunt way of a sailor.

"No, Captain Chandler, and no prospect of it until sunset that I can see," answered the officer addressed as Brainard.

"Well, I hope the winds will come soon and blow strong, for I hate the passengers I am forced to carry and wish for a quick run into Sydney," and the captain glanced meaningly toward the pen in the ship's waist, while his lieutenant answered:

"Poor devils! they are a hard lot, and I wish we were well rid of them, for in spite of the crimes for which they have been sent out for a life of penal servitude, I cannot but think a few of them show innocence in their faces."

"You have a tender heart, Brainard, for an old salt; but I agree with you that some look innocent to my mind, and I refer particularly to that handsome young fellow, who is hated by his fellow-convicts because he gives us no trouble; but it is time to bring them on deck for their two hours' airing, and glad enough will they be to get out of that hot oven between decks," and Captain Chandler bent his gaze over the sea, while Lieutenant Brainard called out in his sharp, stern tones:

"Ho! guard! turn out the convicts for two hours on deck!"

The sentinel gave three shrill calls with a whistle that hung by a string to the iron gate, and in response there came an outpouring of human forms from the hatchway that appeared like bees swarming out of a hive.

They were in convict garb, coarse gray cloth and caps, all alike and ill-fitting, while their hair was close cut, and their faces clean shaven, for they were not allowed to wear beards, and each day or two were forced to pass under the hands of the ship's barber.

A vile, blasphemous lot they were, as a whole, rushing on deck with hot, angry faces and blasphemous jests, and crowding about the grating to breathe in the heated air, which was as nectar to their nostrils after their panting for breath below decks.

The rush of the convicts on deck awoke from their slumbers the three other persons in the hammocks, and they arose quickly and also glanced about them, as though to note the changes that had taken place while they slept.

One of the three was a dashing young officer of twenty-five, in an undress cavalry uniform, and which he readjusted, after his siesta, with the air of one who wished to look well under any and all circumstances.

Crossing the deck he nodded pleasantly to the captain and his first officer, and raised his fatigue cap gallantly to two ladies who had been the occupants of the other hammocks.

One of these ladies had crossed the threshold of two-score years, yet was strangely youthful-looking, and possessed a lovely face stamped with nobleness of character and purpose.

She was conversing with almost her counterpart in exquisitely graceful form and beauty of feature, excepting that the latter was hardly seventeen years of age.

The resemblance between them, with the difference in years, proclaimed them mother and daughter.

"Well, my good aunt and sweet cousin, the calm still continues, and so long have we been battled about in reaching our destination, that I fear me my good uncle will be anxious for your safety," said the young cavalry officer, as he joined the mother and daughter.

"I fear that he will deem our good ship wrecked upon some inhospitable shore, and that his wife, daughter and gallant nephew are the captives of savages," said Mrs. Ainsworth, half in earnest, half in jest.

"Oh, mamma, don't speak so," responded Gulnare Ainsworth, with a shudder, and then she added, quickly:

"It is not my nature to be nervous; but the sight of those poor wretches, day after day, before our eyes, caged like wild beasts, has affected me more than I care to admit," and she glanced toward the wretched convicts.

"Yes, my child, and had I dreamed that their suffering was half as great, never would we have come by a convict craft, though your poor father would have had to wait months yet before we joined him; but soon, I hope, we will be where we can see their misery no more, and yet it seems as though it would be long before I forget them," Mrs. Ainsworth said, sadly.

"Yes, I will vouch for cousin Gulnare, that it will be long before she forgets that handsome young criminal, who has taken his usual stand in the corner, where he can gaze enraptured upon her," said the young cavalry captain, Austin Ainsworth, and he nodded toward one of the convicts who stood partly alone in the aft port corner of the pen, his eyes fixed upon Gulnare.

"For shame, cousin Austin, to attempt to

tease me, and about one who wears the garb of a convict; but though he is herded in yonder pen like a wild beast, and bears the sentence of the king's court upon him, I can but feel that he is not guilty, for no criminal could possess his face," said the maiden, warmly.

"And so I believe, Austin, for I have watched him often, when he thought that no eye was upon him, and I can see nothing but sadness and despair, and not guilt stamped upon his features," rejoined Mrs. Ainsworth.

"Aunt, I feel sorry myself for the poor fellow, for once he held a midshipman's berth in the royal navy, so the captain tells me.

"He comes of a noble family, and it seems a kinsman, who was the convict's unsuccessful rival for the hand of the youth's mother, persecuted them through life, ruined them financially, drove the father to suicide, and brought them to the level of poverty, which sent yonder young man to sea before the mast on board of this very vessel, and under Captain Chandler, to earn a living.

"He sprung overboard one day, when this ship, struck by a squall in port, ran down an admiral's boat, and saved several lives, and again swam out to a wreck on another occasion, and rescued a number of persons, and this act got him his midshipman's berth.

"But he returned home, when his ship was about to sail, and passing through the estate of his old enemy, Lord Ravenal, killed him, and also his groom, robbing the former of his money and jewels.

"A party of huntsmen found him by the dead bodies, and he was taken to prison, and, found guilty by trial, was sentenced to death, and then, on account of his past good record, the sentence was changed to imprisonment for life in the Penal Colonies, and he is now going there.

"Such is the story as I have heard it from Captain Chandler," and the young captain turned his eyes once more upon the man who had been the subject of conversation, while Gulnare, who, with her mother, had listened most attentively to the history of the handsome, sad-faced convict, asked:

"And he denies being the murderer, cousin Austin?"

"Of course, my sweet cousin."

"What is his story regarding his being found there by the dead bodies?"

"That he came upon them lying there, I believe, while he was walking to his home to see his mother, who was an invalid."

"Cousin Austin, I believe that man innocent, and that he is a victim of cruel circumstances, which have broken his heart, or will do so before long, and I pity him from my inmost soul," and Gulnare spoke with considerable warmth, while her mother said quietly:

"And I am of your opinion, my child; but hark! what sound is that?"

"It is a sound that foretells a coming breeze, my dear madam, for our calm is to end in a blow," remarked the captain of the King's Own, approaching, upon hearing her remark.

"It was thunder, then, sir?" Mrs. Ainsworth said.

"Yes, madam, but it is yet a long way off, and the storm will hardly break before night, and then we will get it in full force."

"You anticipate that it will be a severe storm, then?" Gulnare asked, with some interest.

"We must prepare for the worst, Miss Ainsworth, in this latitude, for we are where hurricanes often come; but the King's Own is as stanch a vessel as any afloat, and I intend to make up for the poor fellows we lost overboard in the last gale by selecting several of the sailors among the convicts, and whom I believe I can rely upon, for I am short-handed as it is, and will surely need them in a blow."

"But are you not afraid, captain, to give any of them their liberty?" quickly asked young Ainsworth.

"Oh no, for I shall select one who will be a pretty good judge of the others," and turning to the sentinel pacing before the iron gate of the pen, he called out:

"Ho, guard! permit convict Neil Morgan to come here!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SAILOR CONVICT.

At the command of Captain Chandler, there came out of the prison pen a young man with tall form, erect carriage, and a strangely handsome, fearless face, though upon it rested the imprint of one who had drank the cup of misery to the bottomless dregs.

His hair was cut short, displaying his haughty, well-formed head, his face, clean-shaven, revealed every strongly-marked feature distinctly, while his convict garb fitted him well.

As he approached the spot where the ship's commander stood, slightly apart from his passengers, the face of the young man flushed, as though with shame, and then the red blood retreating swiftly left him almost livid.

"You sent for me, Captain Chandler?" he said, in a voice that was rich and deep-toned.

"Yes, Morgan, I wish to ask you to help work the ship in this coming storm, for, as you know,

in the gale nine weeks ago I lost an officer and half a dozen men, and I am short in hands."

"I am wholly at your service, sir."

"It shall go in the good behavior account against you, Morgan, and, knowing your thorough sea knowledge, I will have you act as second officer, while I wish you to pick out from among the convicts—"

"My fellow-convicts, sir?" said the young man, with sarcasm in voice and look.

Without noticing the interruption, Captain Chandler continued:

"Pick out eight or ten of those you know to have been sailors, and whom you think will be most likely to prove faithful."

"Captain Chandler, there may be men among my fellow unfortunates as innocent as I know myself to be of crime; but I have no intimates among them, and will not vouch for one of them, and it is playing with fire to place any power in the hands of such desperate men."

"I well know that, Morgan; but I must take the risk for the safety of the vessel, and," he added in a low tone that would not reach the ears of Mrs. Ainsworth and Gulnare:

"That is a hurricane looming up yonder, and it will be no child's play to manage this vessel, short of men as the Government always sends us out, even with the help of those you get."

"I feel that the storm will be a severe one, sir, and I will do the best I can to select the men," and saluting politely Neil Morgan returned to his prison pen.

Gulnare and her mother had watched him most attentively the while, and their eyes followed him back among his fellow-convicts.

They saw them gather about him on his return, some of them savage-faced and suspicious, others eager with curiosity, and waving them back, he said, calmly:

"Men, Captain Chandler wishes me to pick out ten of you to help work the vessel through this storm. We are going to have a severe blow, and I want only seamen, so let only those answer, as we want no green hands to risk the safety of the ship."

A perfect yell greeted his words, and every man among them shouted in chorus:

"I'm a seaman! I'm a seaman!"

There arose cries from each and all of them in chorus, begging to be the favored few.

"Silence!" thundered Neil Morgan, in a voice that commanded an immediate hush, and in the same incisive tones he continued:

"Not one of you shall go unless he is a seaman."

"Ho, sir, are you a sailor?" he called out to a huge fellow who had been more noisy than the rest.

"I am."

"Guard, let that man pass through the gate," and raising his voice, he turned to Captain Chandler, who, with young Ainsworth, the ladies and Lieutenant Brainard, stood on the high poop deck, most interested spectators of the strange and exciting scene, and continued:

"There is but one way, sir, to find out who are sailors here, as all claim to be such; but give them an order to carry out, as I send them to you, and that will tell the story."

"Ay, ay, Morgan; you are right there," answered Captain Chandler, and then, turning to the convict who confronted him he ordered him to perform some duty aloft.

The convict looked at him in a sullen way, turned and walked back to the den, muttering to Neil Morgan as he passed through:

"I will have your life for that trick to find me out, and I am no man to make an idle threat."

Neil Morgan made no response to the threat, but called upon the next man he had picked out, and who promptly answered:

"No need of my going, for I don't know nothin' about a ship, 'ceptin' this pen and ther eatin' caboose."

Others called upon made similar responses; but at last ten men were found who had been sailors, as their promptly obeying orders given them by the captain proved, and these were assigned to duty, while Neil Morgan paced to and fro forward, refusing to accept Captain Chandler's invitation to remain on the quarter-deck, where his position as an acting officer permitted him to be.

The sun was now far-nough on its way to the western horizon to peep in under the awning under the quarter-deck, and its rays still fell upon the sea with brazen heat, rendering the heated air most oppressive to breathe.

Louder and louder grew the roll of thunder, and frequently above the horizon arose a black mass of clouds, shooting up into the clear, brassy skies like a vast herd of buffaloes across a prairie.

Out of this black mass ever and anon there flashed a vivid glare of lightning, which was followed by the deep, ominous boom of thunder, resounding like the broadside of a line-of-battle ship.

Still the convict craft lay upon the waters, rocking upon the swell, and stripped of all canvas excepting her stern staysails.

The sea yet remained as placid as a mill-pond, for not a ripple disturbed its surface.

Both Mrs. Ainsworth and Gulnare had proven

themselves good sailors throughout the long voyage, and they had passed undaunted through severe storms; but somehow they now felt deeply awed by the coming hurricane, and sat together upon the deck, watching the daylight fade and the night shadows fall, as though they dreaded the worst.

It might have been the oppressive heat and the breathless calm that oppressed others, but certainly, even the lively young cavalry officer and blunt Captain Chandler seemed to be under the influence of the hour, for the laughter and cheery conversation of the former had ceased, and the latter had little to say and issued his orders in a voice that was hushed.

The convicts in their pen stood in silence for a wonder, gazing at the darkening heavens, and no longer indulging in rude jest and sport.

"This is almost appalling, cousin Austin," said Gulnare, glancing up at her cousin, who leaned upon her chair.

"Yes, a calm before a storm is always impressive," was the answer, and as the words left his lips the very heavens seemed rent in twain, the sea rocked and appeared on fire, with the lurid lightning that burst from the inky clouds, and the crashes of thunder that followed in rapid succession.

"Drive the convicts below and lash down the hatches!" shouted Captain Chandler to the sentinel on duty.

As he turned to obey the order there were thrust out half a dozen strong hands, and he was seized and dragged against the grating, the keys at his belt were torn off, and, in an instant almost, the iron gate was opened, while with yells like incarnate fiends the mad convicts began to press out of their prison pen to strike a mutinous blow for their liberty in the very face of an appalling storm!

CHAPTER IV.

NEIL MORGAN'S SACRIFICE.

So sudden was the act of the convict mutineers, so quickly was it executed, that, hardly had a cry of alarm gone up from the surprised sentinel, before they were rushing out in a steady stream.

"Great God! Ho, Morgan! do you head these men?" cried Captain Chandler, while Lieutenant Brainard and Captain Ainsworth hastened the frightened ladies into the cabin, and darted after them to secure arms.

"Never, sir! I will stand by you to the death," came in the ringing voice of the young convict, and his words reached the ears of Gulnare as she disappeared down the companion-way.

It certainly was a desperate moment for the defenders of the ship, for they had but a few seamen and marines to oppose over a hundred maddened convicts, drunk with the thought of freedom from life-long imprisonment.

But, trained men that they were, they came aft in two columns upon either side of the prison-pen, while Captain Chandler, armed only with a chair which he had hastily seized, and with the sentinel, Neil Morgan and two other convicts his only supporters, stood at bay to meet the rush upon them.

"Back, men, and add not murder to your other crimes!" cried Neil Morgan, springing in front of the wild and desperate men.

"Traitor! do you dare give orders to those you would turn against?" answered the giant who had first represented himself as a seaman, and he sprung upon the young sailor, to fall his length upon the deck, from a blow that struck him squarely in the face.

"Well done, my brave fellow! Take this and beat them back!" and a cutlass was thrust into Neil Morgan's hand by Austin Ainsworth, who just then arrived on deck, accompanied by Lieutenant Brainard, and both of them bearing their arms full of swords and pistols.

Recoiling an instant, at the fall of their leader, who was stunned by the blow dealt him by Neil Morgan, the convicts allowed time for the seamen and marines to crowd in upon them upon either side, while the arms brought by the cavalryman and ship's officer caused those in their front to become the attacking party.

"Back to your pen, you devils!" shouted Austin Ainsworth, firing a shot full in the face of a convict, who fell dead in his tracks.

But, like wild beasts, who are maddened by the scent of blood, the convicts now formed in a compact mass, and, all unarmed though they were, they threw themselves upon the sailors and marines upon the starboard side, and hurled them into the sea.

"Now, those on the other side!" yelled the giant leader, who had regained his feet, and a number of these were likewise thrown overboard, though a few realizing their danger, had retreated to the poop deck, where the determined little band of defenders had rallied for the death-struggle.

"Now, up and at them, convicts!" cried the leader, and with yells like incarnate fiends, they sprung forward to obey the order.

"Fire!" rung out in the voice of Captain Chandler, and it was the last word he uttered, as a capstan bar fell with crushing weight upon his head, while at the same instant Lieutenant

Brainard was run through with a bayonet by a convict, who had seized it from a marine.

But at this moment Neil Morgan, Captain Ainsworth and the half-dozen marines and sailors fired with muskets and pistols upon them, and as many mutineers fell dead in their tracks, while, following up the advantage, as they were temporarily checked, Neil Morgan sprung forward, and his sweeping cutlass dropped two more to the deck.

"Fire on them! Beat them back!" he cried in trumpet tones, while to his side suddenly glided Gulnare Ainsworth, and thrust into his hand a couple of pistols.

"I thank you, lady; but for God's sake go below!" he cried, earnestly, while Captain Ainsworth and the others now coming up, armed with loaded pistols, which Mrs. Ainsworth, her mulattress maid and the negro cook before spoken of, had brought on deck, the convicts fell sullenly back.

"Into your den!" ordered Neil Morgan, and his voice rung out in threatening earnestness.

"Hold on, Sir Traitor, and let us parley," cried the convict ringleader, in response.

"No! Into your den, or I give the order to fire!" was the stern command of the young sailor convict.

It was an awful moment and an appalling scene, for the sea far off was black with the coming tempest, which must soon be upon them, though about the ship all was yet a dead calm.

The heavens were inky black, and the sun, resting upon the horizon, was peering forth from beneath clouds of inky blackness that soon must wholly shut out every particle of light.

Upon the quarter-deck stood Neil Morgan, the sailor convict, slightly in advance of the others, and in one hand he held a pistol, in the other his blood-stained cutlass.

Behind him to one side was Captain Austin Ainsworth, fearless, determined and armed, while at his feet lay the dead captain and lieutenant of the ship.

Behind the cavalryman, in a line, were the two other convicts who had remained true to the ship, and the half-score of seamen and marines who composed the defenders of the prison craft.

Back in the companionway were Mrs. Ainsworth, Gulnare, their maid and the negro, hastily loading pistols and muskets for the use of their brave defenders who had such odds against them.

In the waist of the ship, ranged along against the iron grating of their prison pen, were the convict mutineers, over a hundred in number, and savage unto death in their mien.

They were armed with capstan-bars, a couple of pistols, a musket, a cutlass and an ax, and those thus armed were in the front.

But, should they charge in one wild rush, though some must fall, the others by sheer weight of numbers, must crush those before them.

Neil Morgan and those at his back well knew this, and also did the convicts understand well their chance of triumph.

But would they risk death to a few for freedom for all?

Stepping out boldly from the others, the convict leaders said:

"Neil Morgan, you have proven a traitor to your fellow-unfortunates, and we have you in our power; but we are willing to parley, and we ask you to listen to desperate men."

"Hear what he would say," whispered Austin Ainsworth, adding:

"We are in their power."

"Well, sir, what terms have you to offer?" sternly demanded the sailor convict.

"We are no sailors, and know well that yonder tempest would sink us, if we gained the ship, for we made a mistake in killing the captain and his mate, so we are willing to offer you your freedom if you will take command of the craft."

"And these passengers, the ship's crew and marines?" calmly asked Neil Morgan.

"The passengers we will hold for ransom, and the crew must work the ship until we get to our destination, while the marines will have to hang, for they have been our guards."

"Now hear my terms, men," came in clear-cut tones that reached every ear. "I will take command and work the ship, running her into port—"

"No! no! no!" came in one thunderous shout.

"Hear me! I will take command, and with what men I have here, and three or four seamen from your number, will soon run into port and land these passengers and marines, and then leave you in possession of the ship to go where you so please, the sailors to serve you or not as they desire, and you to hold the ship forward and not come aft under penalty of instant death."

"Such are my terms, and if you do not accept them, rush on here to your death, or await and meet it when yonder hurricane strikes this ship."

A moment of silence followed, and then came a whispered consultation among the convicts, and once more the leader spoke:

"Will you, Neil Morgan, remain on this vessel if we agree to your other terms?"

"No!" peremptorily said Austin Ainsworth.

"Oh, no! no! no!" came from the lips of Gul-

nare and her mother; but in his resonant voice, Neil Morgan answered:

"Men, as you demand me for a sacrifice, I pledge you my word, if you will allow these passengers, the marines and the ship's crew, if so they desire, to land in peace, *I will remain on board for you to do with me as you will.*"

A wild yell of triumph greeted these bold words, while commanding silence by a wave of his hand, Neil Morgan cried:

"Now, convicts, all among you who are not sailors clear the decks; and, crew of the King's Own, to your posts, for the tempest is upon us!"

"Down all! for your lives!"

CHAPTER V.

EL MORO'S BEQUEST.

AT the command of the convict sailor every eye turned from him to the danger that threatened them.

Every sailor sprung to his post, and the convicts rushed into their pens for safety as best they could.

With peals of thunder that shook the seas, with flashes of lightning that were blinding, and a roar of wind and waves that resounded like a mighty battle, with the seeming boom of heavy guns, the rattle of small-arms, the clash of steel, trampling of hoofs and shrieks of combatants all commingling, the hurricane burst upon the devoted ship.

Before the wall of waters struck her the sea seemed to be sinking from beneath her, and down, down she went as though into a watery valley of death, over which mountain waves were to roll.

But, driving before this chaotic mass of waters, winds, thunder and lightning, the charge of the tempest, was a breath of wind, which caught the sails, and, springing to the wheel, as quickly as he could, Neil Morgan brought the bows up to face the furious shock, for she had been lying broadside to the coming storm.

And, just in time did the stanch vessel face the mad onslaught, for hardly had her bowsprit become steady when it pierced the foaming wall, was thrown high into the air, until the craft reached a most perilous perpendicular, and then the decks were swept by rivers of waters from which it seemed she would never stagger out from under, and the despairing shrieks of a few unfortunate convicts who were borne off to death.

"Ha! she has met the shock, and is victorious! Stand to your posts, men, for the peril is not over," cried Neil Morgan, and clinging to the mizzen-stays, as he stood upon the starboard bulwark, he watched every motion of the vessel, and yet kept his eyes ahead upon the wild waste of waters, ordering the helmsmen how to steer from time to time.

Crouching in their den the convicts watched the storm, and the behavior of their vessel, while they also kept their eyes upon those who held the vessel under control, and many a whispered remark of admiration passed around regarding Neil Morgan, who, all knew, had saved their lives, for without his skill, in that trying moment when it was wanted most, the ship would have gone to the bottom crushed beneath the shock of the tempest.

Thus through the night the ship drove on her way, the convicts sullenly watching those who held the quarter-deck, and the defenders on guard and on the alert for a surprise, or rush from those whom they had every reason to dread.

The day broke and still the waters ran wild, still that double watch was kept up untiringly.

One moment of wavering on the part of the ship's defenders, and it would have been fatal, for hungry, tired out, haggard, like wild beasts watching their prey the convicts crouched within their den and the gangways, waiting for a chance to throw themselves upon the brave few who held them at bay.

While Neil Morgan commanded the vessel, sleepless, untiring, watchful and stern, Captain Austin Ainsworth was in charge of the defenders.

They held the quarter-deck, behind a rude breastwork of ship's furniture, boxes and bedding which they had brought from the cabin, and there, with muskets and pistols loaded, and blades at hand, they waited.

In this agony of suspense, the noble mother and daughter were utterly fearless and hopeful.

They carried food and water to the gallant defenders, who would not leave their posts, and encouraged them in many ways.

"Light ho!"

The cry came from the lookout at the fore-top, the evening of the third day after the storm.

"It is the light-house that marks the entrance to the port you seek."

"Soon you will be safe," said Neil Morgan, sadly, addressing Gulnare, who stood near him.

"And you?" she asked, earnestly.

"You heard my pledge to those wretches, lady?"

"Yes, but surely you will not keep your pledge thus forced from you?"

"Yes, I remain with the ship."

"They will kill you."

"So be it! One who wears a convict's garb and life-sentence might as well be dead."

"No, no, my father, Colonel Ainsworth, will gain your pardon—I know he will, after all you have done."

"No, I ask no pardon; I remain with the ship," and he walked away.

Rapidly the ship neared the harbor, and the convicts grew as uneasy as tigers in their cage.

"Would Neil Morgan again prove treacherous and run them into chains again?" was the question that each one asked the other.

It was soon answered, for a small craft lay at anchor ahead, the convict ship was brought to, and a boat was lowered over the stern, while Neil Morgan gave the order:

"All ashore who desire to go!"

"And you will surely come?" urged Mrs. Ainsworth, grasping his arm.

"No, lady; I shall keep my pledge," was the sad reply.

"Say not so, Morgan, but go with us," cried Austin Ainsworth.

"Yes, do come," and Gulnare pressed his hand.

"No! for see! Yonder human tigers are ready to spring, should I attempt to desert them; so go, and quickly, or it will be too late!" sternly said the sailor convict.

Hasty farewells were spoken, and over the side went those whom a cruel fate did not chain to the ship.

Away pulled the boat, and then came the order to get under way once more, and, like beings escaped from a madhouse, the convicts rushed through the ship from fore-castle to quarter-deck, and away sped the fleet vessel out into the darkness of the sea, Neil Morgan calm, stern and expecting death.

But no! His fellow-convicts held back from rushing upon him as he had expected, and with one accord came their cry:

"You are our commander, but we are your masters!"

Away over the waters sailed the convict craft, until presently came a flash from out the darkness and an iron shot flew above the deck.

"A cruiser! a cruiser!" broke forth the cries, and wild excitement ran through the desperate felon crew.

"Crowd on sail; aloft there, lads, and cover her with canvas!" came in Neil Morgan's trumpet voice, and nimble hands obeyed the order.

But, crouching low upon the waters, as though lying in wait for prey, the little armed vessel had not been seen on board the convict ship, and now, under a tremendous pressure of sail, came rushing on astern, firing rapidly.

Through rigging and sail, damaging both, tearing up the decks and rending the bulwarks, the shots came, killing and wounding the poor wretches who had risked so much for freedom.

Then came a shot that cut the tiller-ropes, and sweeping up into the wind, the King's Own was at the mercy of her foe.

Another moment and an armed brig glided alongside and threw out her grapnels, while in a voice of thunder came the cry:

"Boarders, ahoy!"

But heard above the din, came the clear tones of Neil Morgan:

"Convicts, follow me, and strike for your freedom from worse than death!"

One chorus of fiendish cries answered, and beating back the brig's boarders, the convicts threw themselves upon the deck of their foe, few of them armed, but all of them desperate unto death.

Then follows a scene that beggars description, for the brig's crew were beaten down, crushed, hurled into the sea, and the quarter-deck was gained by Neil Morgan and those at his back.

There stood the giant commander of the brig, cutlass in hand, and with a cry of fury he sprung forward, and his blade crossed that of the sailor convict.

Fierce and terrible then waged that duel to the death; but only for a few moments, and then the giant commander sunk to the deck, run through the body by the sailor convict.

"Curse you! who are you, boy?" came through the shut teeth of the dying man.

"I am Neil Morgan, the Convict!" was the bitter cry.

"Ha! now I see all! I have attacked a convict ship for a trader!"

"And I am El Moro, the Pirate, and you, young man, are my heir, for I have vowed that he who killed me in fair combat should inherit my name and fortune."

A deathlike silence followed, and then the pirate chief again spoke:

"Neil Morgan, El Moro leaves you his pirate name, his vessel and his booty, and may they bring you to the gallows is his dying prayer!"

CHAPTER VI.

A PIRATE'S HEIR.

"OH, Heaven have mercy! Have I come to this? My parents dogged by a foe who robbed them of their fortune and me of my inheritance. Raised in luxury and forced to go before the mast to earn a living for my mother, after that man had driven my father to take his own life—called a coward when I begged for leave."

in the face of an enemy, to go and see my poor mother die and receive her blessing, and then, ere I reached her, to be found by the dead body of the man whom I admit I gladly would have slain, and be thrown into prison as his murderer—tried therefor, found guilty through circumstantial evidence alone, and, sentenced to death, have the shock end the life of her whom I had longed to see ere her pulse was forever stilled!

"Alas! how bitter has been my lot, for, a convict, I was herded with the guiltiest of wretches, caged like wild beasts, and sent to a far-away land to toil in chains for life.

"Oh, God! I believe that I should have died, but for the kindly look of sympathy in the beautiful eyes of Gulnare Ainsworth, who, if an angel can be on earth, is certainly one.

"And now what am I?

"A convict still, and even worse, for innocent as such, I am now guilty of having raised my hand, as I believed, to beat off a king's cruiser, that I might not be borne back to a life of despair in irons.

"True, it turned out to be a pirate, one whose name is a terror in these seas, and my good right hand killed him, and, mad herd of desperate wretches that we were, we took his brig and I, I Neil Morgan, a few months ago a gentleman and a king's officer, am now at the head of a mad crew of cut-throats.

"Ay, I am the heir of a pirate, and because I was his victor, he left me as my inheritance, his name, his vessel, his booty, his curse, yes, and his dying prayer that I would end at the yard-arm.

"So be it! I must take my chances, and I doubtless will die on the gallows; but now to see who is master here, for having cast the die, I will be second to none—I will be *El Moro, the Chief*."

Such was the despairing, bitter soliloquy of Neil Morgan, the sailor convict, as he stood in the cabin of the prison-ship, a short while after the victory over the pirate brig.

He had gone there after his desperate battle with the famous El Moro, his heart filled with emotion, and to escape the eyes of those who crowded about him.

The vessels still lay side by side, held by the grapnels, and, having recognized in the pirate crew fellow-comrades in sin, the convicts had ceased the combat and were affiliating with them.

Thus a wild scene was transpiring upon the deck of the brig, while Neil Morgan, alone in the cabin of the ship, was pacing to and fro and communing with his bitter thoughts.

Suddenly his eye fell upon an object that glimmered under the rays of the cabin lamp, and springing forward he seized it.

It was a miniature likeness of Gulnare Ainsworth, exquisitely painted, set in gold and encircled by jewels, and upon the back was engraved:

"TO COUSIN AUSTIN,
from
GULNARE."

"Ah! this is indeed a treasure, and I will prize it most highly—Ha! here is all the baggage of Mrs. Ainsworth, her daughter and nephew, which they never thought to save, so glad were they to escape with their lives.

"But it shall be returned to them, every piece of it—all but this miniature," he added, as he clasped it about his neck.

"Now to go on deck," he said, grimly, and arming himself most thoroughly he ascended to the deck.

The scene that met his eye was a thrilling one, and also one most perilous, for the convicts and the pirates had become allies, the spirit-room had been broken open, and all were drinking to madness.

An officer of the pirate vessel, who had been next in rank to El Moro, was asserting his claims to the title of commander, and was getting a large following in this opinion, though a few of the convicts, relying upon Neil Morgan, were calling loudly for him to assert his rights.

The under officers of the brig were also in league with their lieutenant, so that when Neil Morgan reached the deck a tragic scene was about to transpire, for weapons were in hand, and sides were rapidly being taken.

A shot, a sword-thrust, would have precipitated a battle to the death, and this spark would have been applied, had not the young sailor convict just then sprung over the bulwark of the ship, down upon the poop-deck of the brig.

"Hold! what means this turmoil, men?" he cried, in a voice that reached every ear.

A shout broke from his handful of supporters at sight of him, while, springing out from the midst of his followers, the pirate lieutenant answered:

"It means, Sir Convict, that with the death of El Moro I succeed to the command here, and not you."

The man was, like his chief, large of stature, fierce-faced, bearded and powerful, and he clutched a huge sword in his hand.

A silence fell upon the excited mob at his words, and all eyes of pirates and convicts turned upon Neil Morgan, who, calm-faced and determined, answered:

"Who are you?"

"I am Sydney, El Moro's lieutenant, and the commander of this brig," was the response.

"Your name I do not dispute, sir, but your title I certainly do, for I was bequeathed this vessel, along with the name of El Moro, and I have made up my mind to accept the bequest."

"You have, have you? By the Skull and Crossbone flag I serve, you shall know that I am master here," came the infuriated response, and grasping his sword he called out:

"Ho, lads, who is your chief?"

A wild yell burst forth from his followers that he was; but calmly came the words from the lips of Neil Morgan,

"I shall back up my claim with my life, sir, so stand on your guard, and let the victor be the master."

"Ha! you dare me to formal combat, boy?"

"By Heaven, but you shall feel what it is to meet Sydney the Swordsman, as men call me," and he sprung up the steps leading to the poop-deck, and instantly confronted Neil Morgan, while shouts arose on all sides:

"Ay, ay, let the sword settle it!"

Neil Morgan's sword was one which Mrs. Ainsworth had had manufactured expressly for her husband and was carrying out to him.

It had been left on the ship with their other things, and Neil Morgan had picked it up, as a weapon that had caught his eye, when arming himself in the cabin.

With a calmness that maddened Sydney the Swordsman, as he had called himself, Neil Morgan raised his weapon and the blades crossed with a vicious clash that brought a thrill of joy to the hearts of the wild lookers-on of that strange scene.

CHAPTER VII.

A QUESTION OF MASTERY.

THERE was no doubt but that the pirate lieutenant was a superb swordsman, for, before he had taken to piracy, he had been a master of fence, and he had become feared on shipboard by the crew as a dangerous hand with a blade, even El Moro, his chief, not caring to try conclusions with him.

Naturally, at the death of his chief, he would think that he should be the commander, and he was one who would fight for his rights.

El Moro had been a terror in these waters for years, and had been lying in wait for a rich merchant craft when the convict ship had been sighted and mistaken for their intended prize.

Overwhelmed by the mad rush of the convicts, the pirates, upon discovering who their foes were, had supposed that they would become their allies, and, with their crew greatly thinned down, they congratulated themselves upon the circumstance of their so opportunely falling in with such a reckless lot.

But then arose the question as to who should rule, and Sydney, the Swordsman, asserted his right, to have it contested by Neil Morgan, upon whose young shoulders he had cast his mantle of outlawry and his name of infamy.

Thus brought face to face to contest the situation, the two men, Neil Morgan and Sydney, the pirate, realized all that was at stake in the combat to be fought between them.

With a confidence begotten of his known skill and scores of triumphs in deadly feuds, the pirate lieutenant brought his blade against that of the sailor convict with a force that was meant to at once break down the other's guard.

To his surprise, the hand that held the smaller weapon did not give an inch, and this the beholders saw as well as did the pirate, and they crowded nearer, thrusting battle-lanterns here and there to illuminate the scene.

An instant the two men stood thus, the pirate impatient and glaring, the convict resolute and cool as an icicle.

Then the pirate made a lightning-like movement with his blade, but found it caught with a skill and iron strength that surprised him the more, while a hoarse murmur of admiration broke from the lookers-on.

Breaking the blades loose again, the pirate once more attacked, and thrusts and parries followed in quick succession, and with the same result, for Neil Morgan foiled his adversary at every point.

Again passes, lunges, thrusts and blows were given by the now maddened pirate, and his cool adversary successfully thwarted him with a skill that now won him shouts of approbation.

Furious at the cheers for his opponent, and seeing the tide of popularity setting against him, the pirate rushed at his foe with the savageness of an ungovernable nature.

Instantly Neil Morgan aroused himself, as though for the first time deeply interested in the game of life and death, and met the attack with a move upon the offensive, which drove the pirate backward, amid the demoniacal yells of the convicts.

Beaten at his own game, and driven to frenzy, the pirate dropped his left hand to his belt and seized a pistol, determined to shoot down the adversary he could not conquer with the sword.

But hardly had the weapon left his belt, when, striking down the blade of his opponent by a

terrible blow of his sword, with a dextrous movement of lightning-like rapidity, Neil Morgan brought his steel down upon the arm of the pirate, severing the hand at the wrist, and which fell to the deck still grasping the undischarged pistol.

As a yell of frenzy and pain broke from the lips of the wounded man, Neil Morgan struck from his grasp his huge sword, and sent it flying over the brig's side into the sea, while he said sternly:

"I am master here, sir, and I give you your life!"

"Never!" shouted the pirate, in hoarse tones that arose above the yelling convicts, and drawing a dagger he sprung upon the man who had mastered him, to fall dead at his feet, for the sailor convict drove his blade through his body.

Ere his adversary had hardly fallen to the deck, Neil Morgan turned and glanced over the wild beings on the deck below him, raising his hands for silence.

Instantly a deathlike stillness fell upon the throng, and Neil Morgan said in his calm, distinct tones:

"Men, one and all, do you acknowledge me as master here?"

A terrific shout in the affirmative greeted his question.

"Men, I thank you, and what I do shall be for the best.

"The prison-ship must be surrendered, as she is, to the commandant of the fort at Sydney, for this brig will answer our purpose, for she is well armed, fleet, and all that we need, and in her we will seek our fortunes in American waters.

"Those who wish to be landed at any port, shall be, and those who desire to follow my fortunes I will be glad to have do so.

"Now let the sailors among you get sail upon the two vessels, and when under way I will appoint my officers, and arrange for the landing of those who do not wish to follow the sea, for I know there are many among you who do not."

A cheer greeted the words of the convict commander, and half an hour after the two vessels were under sail, heading for the port which a few hours before it had left.

That there was a nervous anxiety on board the two vessels, both among the convicts and the pirate crew, regarding the determination of Neil Morgan to enter port, was very evident; but the daring young commander had cowed them into submission, at least until they saw that he meant no wrong to them.

The sun was up when the two vessels arrived in sight of the fort, and their coming evidently created a commotion, for across the sleepy sea came the roll of a drum, calling the soldiers to their guns, and upon the battlements a party were discerned, closely watching their approach.

Turning his glass upon them, Neil Morgan gave a start, while his face flushed, for in that group he recognized three well known forms.

They were Captain Ainsworth, his aunt and cousin, and the tall, commanding form with them was evidently Colonel Ainsworth, whom they had gone out to meet in that far-away land.

There were other officers and ladies in the group, but one only among them riveted the eyes of Neil Morgan, and that was Gulnare.

"They are signaling up to the harbor, evidently to send a cruiser down to attack us, for the brig has been well recognized, as well as the prison-ship," said the convict commander, addressing the man whom he had punished as the ringleader in the convict mutiny, whom he had made his first officer.

"Will you run in nearer, sir?" asked the newly appointed officer, with a respect in his voice and manner which there was that about the youthful sailor to command.

"I shall run into a good anchorage and leave the ship."

"They may open on us in the brig when they see us attempt to run out," suggested the convict lieutenant.

"So let them do, for we can stand their fire," was the cool reply.

"And then where to, Captain Morgan?"

"To any port where those on the vessel care to land who do not wish to cast their fortunes with ours."

"And then, sir?"

"To the American shores."

"May I ask what is your intention after that, sir?"

"It would seem, sir, under the circumstances of our being escaped convicts, and being on the deck of a fleet craft, thoroughly armed, there is but one course open for us."

"That is—"

"To turn pirates," was the low remark, and Neil Morgan again raised his glass to his eye, just as a puff of smoke came from a water tier of guns in the fort, and a shot flew whirring over the decks of the two vessels.

Paying no attention to the shot, the convict commander held on his course, and with a like disregard from several other brazen throats to heave to.

Running in toward the fort, he gave the order to luff sharp, and it was promptly obeyed upon both vessels, the prison-ship, as she became

steady, dropping her anchor, and the brig gliding gently alongside.

Entering the cabin of the King's Own, which he had locked, Neil Morgan remained a few moments, and then returned to the deck with a roll of signal flags in his arms.

Adjusting them, he rapidly signaled:

"I surrender to Colonel Ainsworth the convict craft, King's Own, with her cargo intact, and the baggage of his family remaining undisturbed in the cabin.

"The convicts, freed from their chains, go to other lands and seas to seek their fortunes, having last night captured the pirate brig of El Moro."

Having thus signaled, the convict commander called out:

"All hands on board the brig!"

Instantly those upon the King's Own went over the side to the deck of the brig, which at once cast off and glided slowly away under the light breeze.

The moment that she got clear of the prison-ship the party on the ramparts were seen to hastily descend out of view, and as they disappeared from sight the guns of the fort opened hotly at the retreating craft.

"Ah! there they go, returning evil for good," sadly said Neil Morgan, as the iron hail went flying about them.

"Let us run back and cut out the ship, sir, in retaliation," urged the first officer.

"No, I will not do that, nor shall I return their— Ha! there comes a foe that we may have to beat off," and as the young convict commander spoke, there shot into view a small sloop-of-war, that was coming along in pursuit, and under clouds of canvas from deck to truck.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STOWAWAY'S STORY.

WHEN the boat's party left the prison-ship, which had run in, as the reader will remember, near to the fort to let them go ashore, Mrs. Ainsworth and the young cavalry captain gave a sigh of deep relief, as did marines and sailors with them.

Gulnare, however, looked back at the ship, as it sped away in the darkness, seemingly feeling as though she were parting from some dear friend.

The mulatress and the negro fairly giggled with delight, so fearfully frightened had they been on board the vessel, when such a slender thread, as it were, kept the maddened convicts at bay.

The boat was a large one, and the boatswain ordered his men to pull for the shore, and he headed for the water-stairs of the fort.

The prison-ship had been sighted in the offing, by the sentinel on duty, and he had reported it, and Colonel Ainsworth, who had been expecting his family to arrive for the month past, had been wondering why the vessel did not boldly run into the harbor and drop anchor.

When he saw her standing off to sea again, and had not, in the darkness, seen the boat put off from her side, he could not understand the strange maneuver, and said to a brother officer:

"She doubtless has no pilot, and runs out to await daylight to come in by."

"Doubtless, sir— Ha! the sentinel hails!"

"Ay, ay; what is it, sentinel?" called out Colonel Ainsworth.

"A large boat is rowing in toward the water-stairs, sir."

"Ah! the vessel merely touched to land passengers then; but they cannot be those whom I look for, as my wife's letter expressly stated they would come out in the prison-ship, King's Own, which was to bring felons here."

"Captain Desbrosses, kindly meet the boat as she lands and report to me."

And as the young officer of the staff departed, Colonel Ainsworth began to pace the ramparts in deep thought.

He was a finely-formed man, with a true military air, and a face that was full of character and true goodness of heart.

He had been ordered from his elegant home in London to far-away Sydney, and had gone with his regiment without a murmur.

Now he hoped to be able to soon leave the place, as he hated to be forced to view the sufferings of the poor convict wretches about him, and had written to his wife to try and get him ordered to America.

This she had succeeded in doing, and, after a short sojourn in Sydney, they were to depart for the Canadas.

Captain Desbrosses went to the water-stairs and met the boat as it touched, and to his delight welcomed his colonel's wife, daughter and nephew, whom he had before met.

Hastening up to the ramparts with them, he walked away, after pointing out Colonel Ainsworth as he paced to and fro, little dreaming of the joy in store for him.

It was a most happy meeting for all, and going to the colonel's pleasant quarters, Austin Ainsworth told the story of their cruise, Mrs. Ainsworth now and then speaking a good word for Neil Morgan, while Gulnare remained silent.

"I would have pardoned that young fellow if he had only landed with you, for I read of his trial and sentence, and felt sorry for him."

"Guilty or not, he has redeemed himself, and gladly would I give him free pardon, for from what has he not saved those whom I love?" said the colonel, earnestly.

"Alas! Duncan, I fear he is beyond all pardon now, for, remember, he sacrificed himself to save us, having pledged himself to remain on board with the mutineer convicts," said Mrs. Ainsworth, sadly.

"There is a cruiser in the harbor, though she cannot be got ready for sea under ten hours; but I will at once order her to start in chase, as soon as she can, and, if she captures the convict ship, and those devils have killed the youth, Neil Morgan, I shall take the responsibility upon my own shoulders to avenge him, and have every one of them shot," was the stern response of Colonel Ainsworth.

Other matters were then discussed until the deep boom of distant guns broke on their ears, and Captain Desbrosses entering reported that flashes had been seen far out upon the waters, and that a sea fight was evidently waging, for the rattling of small-arms and clash of steel had followed the cessation of the heavy pieces, showing that the combat had come to close quarters.

What it meant none could tell, and when, the next day, the prison-ship was sighted returning to the port, and with her the buccaneer brig of El Moro, that was so well known in these waters, the excitement became intense to solve the mystery, and Colonel Ainsworth and his staff, accompanied by his wife and daughter, went to the promenade on the rampart to await the result.

The signaling from on board the convict craft was witnessed with surprise, and read and received with pleasure, when the signal officer made known what was said by the little flags, for Mrs. Ainsworth had given up as lost, all which she had brought out from England with her.

"To seek their fortunes, mother? Does that mean as pirates?" asked Gulnare, in a low tone, and tears came into her beautiful eyes.

"Alas, my child, I fear that it is so."

"And the young convict, mother?"

"You see him there upon the deck of the brig, and he it was that displayed the signals."

"True, but I cannot believe that he is at heart a bad man."

"Nor can I, my dear; but let us hope that all will come well, though yonder craft flying seaward as she does, leads me to fear that her destiny is that of a pirate."

As Mrs. Ainsworth spoke the colonel came up quickly, and requested the ladies to retire to the shelter of the works, as he added:

"I intend to fire upon the brig and try and sink her, or at least cripple her, that she may fall an easy prey to the cruiser that is now hastening to go in chase."

Then the heavy guns opened, but, contrary to expectation, the brig did not return the fire, and observing this, the ladies returned again to the ramparts, just as a cheer broke from the gunners, for into view dashed the cruiser, leaving the harbor in hot pursuit of the pirate craft.

Finding that his guns did the brig little harm, and that she was rapidly getting out of range, Colonel Ainsworth ordered the gunners to cease firing, and then calling to his young nephew, who had been sent out as his *aide-de-camp*, told him to take a boat's crew and board the convict ship.

This the young officer did, and his going out to the King's Own was watched by those ashore, alternately with the chase of the brig by the cruiser, the latter firing hotly after the escaping vessel, which stood on in grim silence, not once returning the fire of her swift pursuer, greatly to the surprise of the lookers-on.

As the two vessels grew dim in the distance, for the wind was increasing, the boat reached the King's Own, and Captain Austin Ainsworth was seen to spring over the side upon her deck, and to be suddenly confronted by an individual, who just then came from the cabin.

"The ship is not wholly deserted," cried Colonel Ainsworth, as all saw the form emerge from the cabin, and every eye was now directed upon the deck of the King's Own, where the young cavalryman was seen conversing with the one who had so unexpectedly appeared before him.

"Well, sir, who are you?" asked Austin Ainsworth of the man before him.

"A convict, sir, as my garb shows," was the quiet answer of the one he addressed, who was a mere youth.

"And your comrades left you on board?"

"Not intentionally, sir, for I hid myself, when I found they intended to leave the ship."

"You did not care to go with them?"

"No, sir, I preferred to be a convict ashore to a pirate afloat."

"Ha! you mean that the brig has turned pirate?"

"That is the purpose of those who command her."

"And who is her commander, my man?"

"He who, a convict himself, quelled the mutiny among us, and now has been made the chief."

"Neil Morgan, you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is strange that he should have turned pirate."

"A life of freedom on the sea, with a halter about his neck, he doubtless thinks is more enjoyable than living a convict on land and in irons."

"You did not seem to think so."

"No, sir, I am not fond of the sea."

"Your crime was what?"

"I killed a man in self-defense, sir; but no one saw the deed, my own word was of little weight against his dying testimony, for he hated me, and I was sent to live out my days in the king's colony."

There was that about the man's frank way of speaking and his look, which led the young officer to believe that he might indeed be innocent of murder, though he had killed the man for whom he had been sentenced to transportation for life, and he said, feelingly:

"Well, my poor man, if you speak truly, I am sorry for you indeed, and if your conduct ashore is good, I will do what I can for you."

"But now tell me if the vessel was looted before the brig's departure?"

"It was not, sir."

"Well, I am glad to hear that of Neil Morgan at least."

"Oh, no, sir; Neil Morgan, like myself, may have taken human life, but he is no common thief, and he came back here especially to deliver up this vessel and the baggage of yourself and the ladies."

"I am glad to hear you speak well of him, my man; but come, let us get the luggage ashore in the boat, and then I will send to the town for a crew of seamen to come after the ship and take her into the harbor."

The convict sprung to work with a will, and ere long Mrs. Ainsworth and Gulnare had their valuable baggage safely in their quarters, greatly to their delight, for they had given up all as lost.

"Only think, cousin Austin, there is not one thing missing," cried Gulnare, as the young captain joined her on the piazza of their pleasant home, where Colonel Ainsworth made his quarters.

"Yes, Gulnare, there is one thing missing, and which I prized more than all else, excepting the one who gave it to me," he said, seriously.

"And what is that, cousin mine?"

"You remember the miniature likeness of yourself which you gave me?"

"Yes, and have you thought so little of it as to lose it?"

"Nay, Gulnare, do not be unkind, for you know that I wore it constantly about my neck, and the ribbon becoming worn, you bade me give it you that you might attach another."

"Soon after the trouble on shipboard followed, and you thought not to return it, and left it in the cabin."

"There the convict chief—"

"That horrid fellow—"

"No, not the mutineer ringleader, but Neil Morgan."

"Ah! what of him?" she asked, quickly.

"He found the miniature likeness, and after gazing at it a long time, fastened the ribbon about his neck, and carried it off."

"Cousin Austin!"

"It is true, Gulnare; and as much as I admired the young man, I confess I do not like his having my dearest souvenir of you, and more, that your miniature should hang above the heart of a convict, yes, of a pirate, for such he has become."

Gulnare's face crimsoned and her lips quivered; but she said earnestly:

"I will not, cannot believe that he has become a pirate, cousin Austin."

"He certainly has committed piracy upon the high seas in running off with your miniature," answered the captain, morosely.

"That was a piratical act, I admit; but I forgive the act, as he has returned all else, and I will give you another."

"Thank you, and, under the circumstances, I must console myself that he did not run off with the original of the miniature, as he certainly had the power to do, did he so will."

"But how gained you this information, Austin?"

"From the stowaway whom I found upon the convict ship."

"I would like to speak with him."

"Well, he is yonder, helping bring up the luggage; but I must be off, as I have to go up to the town for a sailor crew to carry the ship into port."

And Captain Ainsworth took his departure, while Gulnare went out and beckoned the convict stowaway to approach, for he was working hard to at once show himself upon his good behavior, and the young officer had promised him, as he was the only one of the convict crew left, and had voluntarily given himself up, he would make a requisition to have him allowed him as his attendant.

He doffed his convict cap as he approached the maiden and bowed with a courtly grace that showed he had been reared in refinement.

"My man, may I ask if you saw the convict

Neil Morgan take a miniature which was left in the cabin of the King's Own?"

"I did, lady, for I was watching him from an inner part of the cabin, where he had placed me upon duty."

"And why did he, who had acted so bravely, so honorably through all, take that trinket?"

"Lady, he took it not for its value, its gold case and setting of gems, but, as you have asked me, I will tell you that he took it *because, convict though he is, he loves you!*"

A startled exclamation broke from Gulnare's lips, and with a face that became crimson with the rich blood rushing into it, and then changed to the hue of death, she turned and walked rapidly away, while through her shut teeth came the words:

"My God! loved by a convict! *Ay, and I love a convict!*"

CHAPTER IX.

THE LION OF THE LAGOON.

In their flight the convicts were delighted to find that the brig was a very fleet craft, and the pirate crew on board, who were their allies, made known that the vessel-of-war in the wake was known as the fastest sailer in those waters, though never before had they tried conclusions with her, where many a time had El Moro been chased by king's cruisers, but always with fortune in his favor.

"That stern pivot, sir, will easily reach the cruiser," said one of the pirate officers, addressing Neil Morgan, whose eyes were fixed sadly upon the vessel in their wake.

"I can see that, sir," was the reply.

"Shall I clear the gun for action, sir, and let the cruiser have it, for her fire has several times told on us?"

"No, sir."

"Do you not intend to return the cruiser's fire?" asked the pirate officer with surprise plainly depicted upon every feature of his face.

"I do not, sir, intend to return the cruiser's fire, unless she disables us, and we have to fight to keep her at bay, and then only, for only a year ago I was midshipman upon that vessel, and those on board now are men who were my friends."

The words were delivered in a way that admitted of no argument, and the grumblers retired, while the brig held on her course, continuing to gain steadily, until nightfall, though not without suffering from the fire of the cruiser, whose shot were well aimed, and several times cut through the densely crowded decks, killing and wounding a number of the convicts, while black looks were bent upon their young leader, who would not allow them to strike back when in their power to do so.

Having dropped the cruiser in the darkness, Neil Morgan put the brig upon her course, appointed his officers and the watches, and descended to the cabin of the man by whose death he had won the pirate craft.

It was a charming retreat, furnished with Oriental luxury, and looking more like the boudoir of a Persian lady of rank, rather than the cabin of a pirate chief.

It was with considerable interest that the young convict commander gazed about him, and seemingly under the influence of sadness which he could not throw off, he sought solace by taking up a Spanish guitar that hung near, and running his fingers deftly over the strings.

How often had he charmed his brother officers on long nights at sea, by his master touch upon the guitar, and his rich voice raised in song; but, since the brand of convict had fallen upon him, he had not cared to sing.

Now, suddenly, he burst forth in a melody, and as the music was wafted from the cabin and floated forward upon the wind, a hush fell upon the crew, and ribald jest and rude laughter were silenced, for he who sung had the power to touch men's hearts, even though their lives were crime-stained and they wore the brand of convicts.

Dashing the instrument aside impatiently, Neil Morgan began to look over a mass of papers left by the pirate chief, and until late into the night he occupied himself with these, for, though surrounded by over a hundred human beings, he felt himself wholly alone, isolated as it were, in their midst.

Thus the days passed away, the brig held on her course for American waters, until at last a port was reached one night, and those who cared not to remain on board and cast their fortunes with the vessel were landed, but not until Neil Morgan had supplied them most liberally with gold from El Moro's treasure found on board.

A short stay at this port as a foreign man-of-war, and the brig again set sail, until at last she reached the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Richly freighted merchant ships had been passed time and again, but sternly did the convict commander refuse to give chase, or even attack one day when in a calm it could easily have been taken.

What was his intention, wondered the crew?

Could it be that he did not intend to hoist the black flag?

It certainly looked so.

He kept himself aloof from his crew, except when on duty, and his manner was stern and

unbending, though dark looks were turned upon him, and the mutterings of discontent became louder and louder.

One balmy night the brig was cruising slowly along the Mexican shores; a light wind was blowing off the shore and the skies were overcast, as though a storm was threatening.

In the cabin sat Neil Morgan, his elbows upon the table, his face upheld by his hands, and his eyes riveted upon the little miniature which he had taken from the cabin of the convict ship.

"Can I yield to the demands of these mad criminals and become as bad as they, ay, worse, when I look upon this sweet face?"

"No, no; accursed as I am with the brand of felon that I bear, I will not do that; no, not yet, not yet."

He paused, not knowing that dark faces gazed down upon him from above, and eager ears drank in his every word.

Then the faces were withdrawn, and the moments passed by until presently a man entered the cabin and sat down unasked before the young commander.

It was one of the convicts, and a man of forty years, with a face that denoted power, intelligence, and seemed to have indelibly stamped upon it a history that a casual observer could not fail to note, yet no eye could solve.

Neil Morgan had noticed him in the prison-pen on the King's Own, long ere the voyage was near its close, and wondered what had been his past, and what crime he had committed to bring him there.

He had not said that he was a sailor, after the capture of the brig, he had taken no active part in the convict mutiny; but when Neil Morgan had picked him out and appointed him one of his officers, he had at once proven himself a thorough seaman.

He was known on board as Captain Angelo, and he had a certain quiet influence with the crew that was very great.

Though he bore a Spanish name, and Neil Morgan noted that he spoke the language perfectly, he yet spoke English equally as well, and his nationality was hard to determine.

"Captain Morgan, I came in to have a little chat with you," he said, calmly, as the young convict commander looked up in surprise at his coming into the cabin as he did.

"Well, sir, I am ready to hear what you have to say," was the response of Neil Morgan.

"It shall be soon said, sir, and to begin, I may as well tell you that I am more than I seem in this convict garb, and the waters where you now are I am perfectly familiar with."

As the convict commander made no reply, Captain Angelo continued:

"I am an Englishman, sir; but years ago was driven from my native land by the malice and persecution of one who should have been my protector, my friend. He made me what I am, for I went from bad to worse until I became a pirate, and from the fore-castle I went to the quarter-deck of my own vessel."

"Armed with the power to carry out an early registered oath of revenge against the one who had so wronged me, I sailed for English waters, left my vessel in hiding, under the command of my senior officer, and went in disguise to the home of my boyhood."

"It was some weeks before I had my plans of vengeance all laid; but at last I was able to strike, and my blow fell, and it fell heavily, for he who had been my bitter foe saw those he loved taken from him, one by one, in some mysterious way he could not understand, and, when his wife and three children were dead, I confronted him one night, as he sat in his desolate home, grieving over his loss, and told him who I was, and that I had dealt him the stroke of revenge."

"But that was not all, for he, too, fell by my hand, and I was content, and calmly took my departure."

"Arriving at the little seaport near where I had left my vessel, I found there one of my crew, and he told me that my lieutenant had proven a traitor and run off with my craft and the booty I had on board, and he laughed at my rage, and said that he would have me arrested as a pirate unless I paid him an exorbitant sum which he named."

"I struck him dead at my feet, and though I saw that my act had witnesses, and coolly gave myself up, claiming that he threatened to kill me, I was thrown into jail and lay there a year before I was tried, and, you know the result, for you were my fellow-convict, sent out to the king's colony to serve a lifetime in durance vile."

"You know also all that happened, and that we captured the pirate brig of El Moro, and he made you his successor; but, Neil Morgan, you do not know that he who called himself El Moro bore the name that I bear here on shipboard, that of Angelo, for he was my traitor lieutenant."

"On this brig now are men who belonged to my crew and know me, though, with my long hair and beard shaven off and felon's garb, they did not recognize me as their old commander."

"He sailed for Australian waters, when he ran off with my brig, and, assuming my name, spread terror far and wide; but he met, at your hand, punishment at last, and upon your shoul-

ders he tried to throw his mantle of piracy and good-fortune that clung to him so long."

"Alas for you, Neil Morgan! it is not destined that you shall wear the name, for here, in the Gulf, I am known as the Lion of the Lagoon, and you have but come into my den to become my victim, for from yonder open light I have heard your words, and knowing that you would prove treacherous and sell us to those who would hang us, I have determined to again take possession of my kidnapped vessel, my beautiful and fleet Winged Tigress of the Sea, and my first duty shall be to string you up to the yard-arm, that, fellow-convicts though we have been, you shall feel what it is to betray El Moro, the Lion of the Lagoon!"

CHAPTER X.

THE LIONESSE OF THE LAGOON.

THE strange scene that was transpiring in the cabin of the pirate brig known as the Winged Tigress of the Sea had lookers-on from the lights above, and the man who called himself El Moro was not alone with his intended victim, Neil Morgan.

From where the young sailor convict sat he did not see that half a dozen cocked and leveled muskets covered his heart, held in the hands of men who would not hesitate an instant to do the bidding of El Moro, the real pirate; but Neil Morgan heard, without the quiver of a muscle, the words of the man before him. He had passed through too many severe ordeals not to know how to perfectly control all emotions, and his muscles and nerves were like iron.

If El Moro had hoped to see him cower before him at the terrible fate he threatened him with, he was mistaken, for the sailor convict met his gaze firmly, heard him to the end, and said with an air of utter indifference:

"Well, sir, I have heard your story, and see no reason to doubt your being the real El Moro, for you look it."

"What mean you?" asked the pirate, his face flushing and his manner nonplused by the coolness of Neil Morgan.

"I mean that you look the pirate that you are, a cool, avaricious, cruel villain."

"Ha! you dare to insult me?—No, no, I will not get angry with one whose neck is in the noose and the rope-end in my hand that I may draw him into eternity," said El Moro, viciously.

"Well, it is simply a matter as to *when* I die, it seems, and it matters not to me whether I am hanged by a pirate now, or wait to be hanged as a pirate," was the perfectly cool remark of Neil Morgan.

The pirate looked at him in amazement, for, though calm in peril himself, he found one before him who was his superior certainly.

"Do you not fear death?" he asked.

"Would I have been an officer in the king's service had I done so?"

"By the Rad! I believe you court death."

"No, I do not seek it; but being what I now am, I would do little to avoid it," was the sad response.

"Come, I like you, and you shall be my second in command, so give me your hand on it."

"No, I will not be a slave where I have been master," was the cold rejoinder.

"You will be chief or nothing?"

"Just that—nothing less!"

"Well, chief you shall not be; but, as I like your indomitable pluck, and know what you are as a sailor, I will give you time to consider my proposition, as to being my lieutenant, so one week from to-day I shall demand an answer."

"And if I refuse?"

"You are too dangerous a man to allow to go free, for I would live in constant dread of you, so I shall hang you and end the matter."

"Now you will pardon me if I put you in irons."

Neil Morgan arose quickly to his feet, his hand grasping the back of the chair he had been sitting in; but before he could raise it, as seemed his intention, the pirate said quickly:

"Cast your eyes upward, señor, and you will see that resistance is in vain."

The sailor convict did so and beheld the muskets leveled at his heart, so he said in the same calm way in which he had before spoken as he resumed his seat:

"It seems, Sir Lion of the Lagoon, that you have me in your power, so I can but submit; but it is a long lane that has no turning, goes the old adage."

"Ho, on deck there!" called out El Moro, his face wearing a grim smile of triumph.

"Ay, ay, sir," and the ringleader of the convict mutineers descended the companionway, with iron shackles in his hands.

"Iron that gentleman, sir."

"Better accept Captain El Moro's offer to be second in command, Mr. Morgan."

"He has given me time to consider it," was the response, and Neil Morgan held out his hands for the irons, and, when they were clasped, about his ankles the shackles were placed, while El Moro said:

"Now am I master here once more."

Leaving Neil Morgan to his own thoughts, the man who had so daringly placed himself at the head of the wild spirits on board the brig, went

on deck and quietly took the helm, while a cheer greeted him, for all that had been going on in the cabin was known, and the crew had been afraid of being entrapped by the young sailor convict, for they felt in their hearts that he was not one to come down to their level in guilt.

As the brig held on its way, with El Moro at the helm, and slowly neared the shore, an order from the pirate leader went forth to gradually shorten sail.

Standing upon a bold bluff, heavily wooded, and watching the approach of the vessel, was a man dressed in Mexican garb.

He evidently was acting as a sentinel, or lookout, for back in the timber was a small shelter, and behind it, against an adobe chimney-place, a small fire was burning.

Serapes were scattered about beneath the shelter, and the place had the appearance of being more than a temporary camp.

Suddenly the man turned and placing his hand to his ear listened an instant, while he muttered in Spanish:

"The lioness is coming!"

The sound of approaching hoofs now broke on his ears, and soon a cavalcade dashed up.

There came first a peon runner on foot, keeping ahead of the horses as easily as a hound might have done; then mounted upon a spirited black mustang, dashed up to the bluff, a woman, while behind her were four horsemen attired in the costume of *caballeros*.

Throwing herself from her horse, as the peon runner sprung to the animal's head, the woman glided, rather than walked, so graceful was her motion.

In the twilight haze her pace could not be well discerned, but her actions were those of one who was youthful, and her voice, though ringing and firm, was yet musical and full of richness.

"Well, Duluth, you sent for me?" she said, speaking in English, but with the slightest accent in the world.

"Yes, Lady Lulu, I sent the peon for you as I sighted a sail that looked strangely familiar, and now that she heads in toward the lagoon pass, I am sure that it is the brig," answered the sentinel.

An exclamation broke from the lips of the woman, and seizing the glass from the sentinel, she turned it quickly upon the approaching vessel, while, after an instant she cried excitedly:

"It is the Winged Tigress! Holy Mother be praised, that after all these weary months of waiting my father comes back to me."

Then turning to the sentinel, she continued:

"Duluth, give the signal, and we will know if it is indeed my father returning, or traitors who have captured his vessel."

Stepping back into the timber the man soon returned with a red and a blue lantern, and stepping out upon the edge of the bluff he whirled them in circles about his head for a dozen times.

No response came from on board the brig, and while all awaited in suspense, he repeated the signal.

Then came a bright flash from the bows of the pirate brig, a heavy gun pealed across the waters, and simultaneously to the truck of each mast went a colored light, the one red and the other blue.

"It is my father! Heaven, I thank thee!" cried the woman, and springing to the side of her horse she leaped into the saddle and dashed away, while Duluth said fiercely:

"Curses on him! I hoped that he was indeed dead, for then I would have been chief here, and Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Sea, should have been my bride."

"But I do not yet despair."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAIR OF THE LIONESS.

FOLLOWING the Lioness of the Sea upon her departure from Sentinel Bluff, as the point of lookout was called, we proceed along a ridge that penetrates back into the interior for a mile or more, and there verging to the right comes out as a cliff some sixty feet in height that overhangs an inlet, or arm of the sea.

The ridge is thickly wooded, and scattered about among the timber are log-cabins, while camp-fires blaze cheerily here and there.

The cliff is bare of trees, but it has a threatening look, for there is erected a fort containing six guns, two of them long eighteens, and the others howitzers, mounted on pivot-carriages, so as to command the approach by land and water alike.

The ridge is little more than a narrow neck of land, with a lagoon upon the further side, winding its sluggish way to the Gulf, and the inlet, narrowing from a small bay below, to a hundred yards in width opposite the cliff, and with an intricate channel running through it.

On the other shore the ridge still continues its way along through swamp lands, but being but half the height it is at the fort, is readily commanded by the guns.

On the other side, the rear, the ridge slopes down to the shore of a small basin, where are anchored a score or more small sail-boats, with skiffs, cat-rigged craft and yawls.

To reach this basin a vessel would have to pass the fort, rounding the cliff.

Across the basin a corduroy road is seen wind-

ing its way through the swamps on either side, to prairies far in the distance, and which are dotted with cattle and mustangs, while a camp is seen in a *motte* not far distant.

Such is the scene from the little fort by day; but at night, when the Lioness dashed up to a large cabin standing in the rear of the fortification and dismounted, the darkness prevented her viewing the surroundings.

Stepping up to the door of the cabin, she took from a peg, where it hung, a small silver bugle and blew some shrill, winding notes.

As she ceased, like an echo, afar off toward the prairie-camp an answer was heard, while across the inlet also came a response.

"Well, if there are traitors on the brig they will find us ready for them, and if my father returns, they will be prepared to give him the welcome he deserves after so long an absence," said the woman, and throwing open the cabin door she entered it, while her followers departed on various duties she had directed them to perform.

The interior of the log hut had the appearance of a ship's cabin, for it was about the size and shape, and furnished wholly with what had come from on board vessels.

It was richly furnished too, with paintings adorning the walls, and various *bric-a-brac* scattered here and there, while over in one corner was a mahogany desk of rare workmanship.

A handsome ship's lamp hung from a rafter, and gave a cheerful glow over all, and revealed distinctly the face and form of the mistress of the isolated house there on the Gulf coast.

She was attired in a riding-habit, the material being velvet and the waist trimmed with gold lace and buttons.

The sleeves were slashed and ornamented with gold braid and buttons, and the habit fitted the willowy form to perfection.

Her head was sheltered by a sombrero of a delicate gray hue, and it was richly embroidered, and also decorated with two plumes, one a bright scarlet, the other of inky blackness.

The face thus sheltered by the sombrero was one of the dark, Mexican type of beauty, for it was beautiful, but haughty and perhaps cold.

But the lips were full, cherry red, and the teeth perfect, while her eyes seemed to be slumbering wells of intense feeling.

She could not have been over nineteen, and yet there was that about her that showed one who was born to make men her slaves.

Throwing aside her gloves and whip, the maiden took a night-glass from the bracket and walked out toward the fort.

Reaching it, she found there fully two-score of men, one of whom stepped forward to greet her.

It was Duluth, the man who had held the position of under-captain to the lagoon pirates, and who, upon going his rounds, had descried the coming brig, and at once dispatched the peon sentinel to warn the fair mistress of the outlaw band.

"Is all in readiness to greet a foe, Señor Duluth?" asked the maiden.

"Yes, Lady Lulu; but yonder brig brings no foe, for see, she follows the channel without a mistake," and he pointed to the brig which was visible coming up the little bay.

"Yes, but a traitor hand may hold the helm, señor, though Heaven grant it be my father."

"Should it not be, however, that brig shall be taken, so signal across to the Trap fort, to see if the Señor Del Norte is at his post."

Duluth raised a red lantern from behind a gun-carriage, and turned it twice around his head.

Instantly across the water upon the ridge the signal was answered.

"Bueno! Del Norte is ready; now signal the Señor Bandero at the prairie camp," said the maiden.

Taking up a blue glass lantern, Duluth gave a signal with it, turning his face across the lowlands toward the prairie camp before spoken of.

Again the signal was answered, a blue light being seen to make three circles, as though around a man's head.

"Good! now let the brig come on, bring she friend or foe," said the Lady Lulu, and she turned her gaze upon the coming vessel, which certainly followed the circuitous channel with wondrous precision, considering the darkness of the night.

Nearer and nearer came the brig, until she was within easy range, when Lady Lulu said:

"Señor Duluth, send a shot across her bows, and that will tell the story."

A moment after one of the twelve pound ship's howitzers boomed forth, and the shrieking shot struck the water just ahead of the coming vessel.

The result seemed magical, for instantly a blue light was burned, and the brig and every man on board were distinctly revealed to those in the fort, and from the lips of Lady Lulu broke the cry:

"See! it is my father! he has returned after more than a year's absence."

"Yes, Satan has taken care of his pet, to let that man return just as I began to feel that I would be master here."

"But, El Moro, your coming back shall not

drive me from my purpose," and Duluth fairly gritted his teeth with rage, as he uttered the threatening words that were forced from his lips at seeing the return of the Winged Tigress of the Sea, and recognizing upon her deck El Moro, the Lion of the Lagoon.

CHAPTER XII.

EL MORO AT HOME.

HAVING shown that she was no traitor craft, the Winged Tigress was allowed to come on up the inlet, round the cliff into the little basin and drop anchor.

As the anchor touched the water Lady Lulu ran alongside in her light skiff and sprang on board the brig, where she was met by El Moro, who clasped her in his strong arms, and led her to the cabin.

There sat, in double irons, Neil Morgan, and as the eyes of the maiden fell upon him, she seemed almost fascinated by the dark eyes that met her own.

Rising politely, while his chains clanked, Neil Morgan bowed with courtly grace, raising his manacled hands and removing his convict cap.

Lady Lulu returned the bow, and while her face flushed, said quickly:

"Father, who is this gentleman that you hold as your prisoner?"

"My child, never mind the prisoner, for he shall be removed forward while you sit down and talk to me and tell me all that has happened during my long absence."

"I have much to tell you, father, and long to hear why you have deserted me for so long a time; but tell me, who is this señor?"

"As you appear to desire an introduction, Lulu, I will present the señor as Neil Morgan, late an officer of the Royal Navy of England, who killed an enemy and was sentenced to life-long imprisonment at the Penal Colonies."

"As a convict on a prison-ship I met him, and after a mutiny, in which he turned against his fellow-felons, he was placed in command, but I feared he would betray us, so took command myself."

"Señor, this is my daughter, the Lady Lulu," and El Moro spoke in a way that showed his desire to make a bad impression in the maiden's mind against Neil Morgan.

"Señor, you are in trouble, and I feel sorry for you, while I believe you must have been falsely accused, for you neither look like a man to commit murder, nor one who would be a traitor to comrades."

And Lady Lulu spoke with a frankness that touched the heart of Neil Morgan, who answered:

"Lady, for your kind words I thank you."

"Come, Lulu, let us go ashore, for I am anxious to stretch my legs upon land after the long cruise we have had."

"We can talk over all that has occurred when we are alone in the cabin."

And El Moro spoke in a manner that showed he did not at all relish the scene between his daughter and the prisoner.

"And the señor?" asked Lulu.

"Remains here in irons until I see fit to release him, if he does as I wish, or to hang him if he brings it upon himself," was the angry retort, and taking his daughter's hand he led her from the cabin.

Leaving the brig in the charge of his lieutenant, with orders to allow no one to come ashore, El Moro got into the skiff with Lady Lulu, and soon landed upon the beach below the cabin.

There he was met by a number of his band, who welcomed him back with a cheer, and Duluth, stepping forward, greeted him warmly, as though he had not sworn vengeance a short while before.

"Where is Captain Mendez?" asked El Moro, glancing over the crowd.

"Dead, Señor Chief, and I hold his place," answered Duluth.

"Indeed! how met he his death?"

"As a mutineer, señor; but the Lady Lulu will doubtless explain all."

"I will, father."

And the two walked on to the cabin.

"Ah! you have made improvements here, Lulu, and I am glad to see it," said El Moro, as he glanced at the camp which was lighted up by fires.

"I have made many changes, father, which I trust you will approve of," was the quiet reply.

And the two entered the cabin, the pirate throwing himself into a lounging-chair, and Lulu taking a seat near him, while she said:

"Now, father, tell me why you have remained away so long from me, causing me to believe you dead?"

"It can be told in a few words, Lulu," and El Moro made known the story of his adventures, as the reader knows them, telling of the convict ship, the storm, the mutiny and all as it occurred, and finally of the suspicion that Neil Morgan meant to betray them and what followed.

"Father, you are mistaken in that young man, or his face is a mask of honor to hide a heart of deceit and guilt."

"I admit that much; but he has the chance to prove his faithfulness and become my second in

command, for a better man I never saw; if not, I shall not live in dread of treachery in my camp, and he shall die within the time I gave him to make up his mind whether it would be life or death to him; but now you have my story, so let me know what has occurred here."

"Well, father, I hold the reins here."

"You?"

"Yes, father."

"A mere child holding power over my wild band?" and El Moro seemed lost in commingled surprise and admiration.

"Yes, father, I am the Lioness of the Lagoon," was the calm response.

"Tell me how this happened, Lulu."

"You sailed away, bent on seeking revenge against a foe in England, and your limit to return was six months, as you remember."

"True."

"Well, nine went by and still you came not."

"Then I noticed that there was uneasiness and dissatisfaction in the band, and Mendez boldly asked me to become his wife."

"Duluth resented it, and the men took sides with the two leaders, and the result was a constant turmoil which at last ended in a desperate battle."

"Mendez had the greater number of followers, and he was about to triumph, when I mounted my horse, dashed into the midst of the combatants and told them that I was their leader, and instantly I ordered out Mendez and his officers and had them shot."

"Bravo for you, my child, my darling girl! but can it be that this little girl of mine can have proven herself equal to be leader of an outlaw band?" cried El Moro, with enthusiasm.

"You shall know all, father."

"Having quelled the mutiny I made Duluth captain of the camps, and then I established a fort on the prairie, a league away, and formed a guerrilla band under the Señor Bandero, while I built a masked battery or fortress across the inlet, and placed there the Señor Del Norte, so that neither by land or sea could foe attack us without being readily defeated."

"I did this, for a Government force was sent to attack us by land, and three schooners were to support them by water, while one of our men was to turn traitor and pilot the sea force—"

"Ha! who was he?"

"Natouche."

"And where is he?"

"I had him shot."

"By Neptune's beard! but you are as well able to command the Lagoon Pirates, Lulu, as is your father; but how knew you of this attack by the Government?"

"From Colonel Rublo."

"Ah, yes! and I suppose, in return he asked your hand in marriage?"

"Father, Colonel Rublo has always professed to love me, when I was a school-girl in the city of Mexico, and you were wont to come there to see me, and I believe that he had your sanction to make me his wife."

"The truth is, Lulu, Colonel Christo Rublo holds a high position, and has immense influence, and he saw you at your academy in Mexico City and loved you."

"You were then known as the daughter of a very wealthy ranchero, and the colonel has squandered his inheritance, and, when I visited you in disguise, he knew me not as I was, and asked you for your hand."

"I gave my consent, and then you took it upon yourself to discover just who your father was, and what was his occupation, and disguising yourself as a peon boy you came here with me, and further concealment was useless."

"Then it was that I was captured, and knowing Colonel Rublo's needs, sent for him, told him who I was, and that you were living with me, and I gave him gold enough to pay his gambling and other debts, and I was allowed to escape."

"Since then, I have arranged to pay him a certain sum to prevent an attack upon me, and as I was absent and could not do it, I suppose he organized this expedition against me, and was bought off by your promising to marry him, doubtless."

"Oh, no, father, he warned me of the attack, and I was prepared for it, and while Bandero beat back the land force, our forts sunk one of the schooners, and Duluth boarded and captured another, the third escaping."

"And you planned this, my child?"

"Yes, father, and Bandero, Del Norte and Duluth obeyed my orders."

"Can this be my little school-girl, who two years ago little dreamed that her father was the noted Lion of the Lagoon?" said El Moro, admiringly.

"I am my father's child, I fear," she said, with a sad smile, and then added:

"Finding out that my father was a pirate, I accepted the situation, and believing him to be dead I simply stepped into his place."

"And you have done nobly; but about Rublo?"

"I have an appointment with him three nights hence."

"Well, you shall keep it and act as you deem best; but how many are there in the band now?"

"In the main ridge fort we have forty, across

the inlet, in Fort Trap, twenty, under Bandero on the prairie there are half a hundred, and he has taken to playing bandit, which brings in a good revenue, while the sailors of our little lagoon fleet, counting the schooner we captured, and which is now off on a cruise, make sixty more, in all about a hundred and seventy men."

"Lulu, you have done nobly, and I have over a hundred more desperate fellows, and with the brig and the sunken schooner, which can be raised, I can have a fleet of three large vessels, not to mention the lagoon crafts."

"Yes, father, you can be a corsair commodore."

"Ha! you have called my name, girl!"

"I will sweep the Gulf as El Moro, the Corsair Commodore, and you shall become the richest woman in the world."

"Ha! ha! ha! El Moro, the Corsair Commodore! a name that shall be dreaded from Key West to Yucatan!"

And springing to his feet the ambitious buccaneer excitedly paced to and fro, his daughter calm and impassive the while.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CORSAIR COMMODORE.

WITH his ambition awakened and his pride aroused by his daughter's captures, and having beaten off an attacking Government force, El Moro set to work with a will the next day to form his camp into a well-disciplined fortification, and organize his vessels into a fleet of sea and coast robbers.

From having his haunt in the lagoons, and rushing out in small sail-boats or row-boats to pounce upon any vessel that approached too near the coast, El Moro had gained the name of the Lion of the Lagoon, and his crew were known as Lagoon Pirates.

Capturing the brig, and which was a trim and fleet merchant craft under the American flag, he had armed and manned her, and then gone on piratical cruises in the Gulf until he became dreaded in deep water as well as along shore.

Being in possession of a vessel that gave him the power to cross the ocean and seek revenge for injuries done him, and which had forced him to fly from his native land a fugitive from justice, he had carried out his plot, and at the same time nearly lost his life, while his lieutenant had run off with his vessel.

Through a strange combination of circumstances, he had been enabled to return to his lair in his brig, and in doubt as to what had occurred, and the fate of his daughter, he had found fortune smiling upon him, and that he possessed quadruple the power that he had ever held before, through the able management of his beautiful daughter, who, in discovering that she was the daughter of a pirate, accepted the situation, though with a sad heart, and bowed her head submissively to the inevitable.

"My child, you shall rule ashore and I upon the sea," said El Moro to his daughter at breakfast the next morning, and then he told Lady Lulu how it was his intention to at once raise the sunken schooner, put her in perfect repair, man her, and placing trustworthy officers upon the two vessels, to cruise with them in search of booty, the Winged Tigress being his flag-ship.

"As I have had my revenge against those who wronged me in England, I shall name one of the schooners the Retribution, and having been a felon, I shall call the other the Convict," said El Moro.

"Why not place the sailor convict, whom you hold as prisoner on the brig, in command of one of the schooners?" quietly asked Lulu.

"Egad, I will gladly do so, if he will come to my terms," was the ready answer.

"And what terms do you demand of him, father?"

"That he commands my old crew, which he cannot betray, or cause to betray me, and swears by all that he deems holy, to be true to the Red Hand flag."

"If he refuses?"

"Then I shall swing him up to the brig's yard-arm and end the matter."

"He will doubtless consent, father, if I tell him there is no hope for his life otherwise."

"There shall be no hope if he refuses, and you know that I am not one to make idle threats."

"I will see him, father, for I believe that he will be of great service to you in carrying out your plans."

"I know that he will, Lulu, for a better sailor never trod a deck, nor a braver man."

"I like the fellow, but somehow I fear him, and he has that in his look that makes me uneasy."

"If he prefers to die, he shall have his choice, and I will place Duluth on one schooner and Del Norte on the other, while you have full sway ashore."

"Juan Mendez is now in command of the schooner that is at sea."

"The brother of the traitor?"

"Yes, father."

"I will not trust him as commander, though he can be my first luff on the brig."

"If he does not like this he will fare worse, for I will have no suspicious men in my command," was the significant reply, and El Moro left the

cabin to begin the work he had on hand, while Lady Lulu threw a light scarlet scarf about her shoulders, and going down to the shore sprung into her skiff and sculled rapidly out to the brig.

A number of the convict crew had already been sent ashore, according to her father's orders, to aid in raising the sunken Mexican schooner; but there was an officer and a score of men yet on board, and the former received her at the gangway.

"How can I serve the Lady Lulu?" he asked politely.

"I would see the prisoner, Señor Morgan."

"He is in the hold, señorita."

"And why there, sir?" she asked indignantly.

"According to orders from the chief, sent off this morning, señorita."

"Send the prisoner to the cabin, where I will see him," said Lulu, and she turned on her heel and walked aft, while the officer obeyed, and soon appeared with Neil Morgan, still loaded with irons.

"I will take charge of the prisoner, señor; you can go," quietly said the maiden, as the pirate officer lingered.

"But, señorita, I—"

"Go, sir!"

The eyes flashed and the hand pointed imperatively up the companionway, and the lieutenant turned and left the cabin.

"Señor, you are in misfortune, being a prisoner where you have been master."

"Be seated, for I have come to speak to you," said Lady Lulu, motioning to a chair, which Neil Morgan took, bowing in acknowledgment of her kindness, while he said sadly:

"Yes, lady, it seems that ill-fortune has hung close in my wake of late."

He was pale, but his handsome face was fearless, his lips resolute, and his eyes were full of fire.

He still wore his striped convict uniform, and held his cap in his hand.

"Señor Morgan, my father has decided that you are to die, unless you agree to certain terms," she said, gazing into his dark eyes, which seemed to hold a fascination for her which she could not resist.

"Pardon, señorita, but do you note the shadow which the sun casts here through the open light overhead?" he said in a low tone.

She started, for she distinctly saw the shadow of a man's form cast upon the cabin floor.

He was bending over, and distinctly revealed was one hand held to the ear, in the attitude of listening, and it plainly told the story of an eavesdropper.

Without reply the maiden drew from her scarlet sash about her waist, a small, silver-mounted pistol, and aiming at the glass, near which the man's head must be, she drew trigger.

With the explosion came the clatter of broken glass mingled with a terrified fall, and the light came down with a bang.

A silvery laugh broke from the lips of Lady Lulu at the frightened yell of the lieutenant, and Neil Morgan could not restrain his laughter as he heard the rapidly retreating footsteps of the eavesdropper.

A moment after the lieutenant, with livid face and quivering voice dashed down the companionway crying:

"Oh, señorita! has he killed you?"

"Señor Lieutenant, it was I that fired the shot, and I aimed at your shadow."

"Repeat your eavesdropping and I will fire at your heart."

"Go!"

The humbled officer was glad to retreat, and lost no time in doing so, while Lady Lulu again said:

"Would you know the terms my father offers, señor?"

"Lady, can it be that you are a pirate's daughter?" earnestly said Neil Morgan.

"Yes, señor, I am the daughter of El Moro, the Lion of the Lagoon, and it is he that offers you terms for your life."

"He gave me his terms, lady."

"And your answer?"

"I will not accept them."

"He now offers you a separate command of a schooner, a fleet, seaworthy craft, well armed, equipped and manned."

"For piracy?"

"Yes; he will give you his own faithful crew, and you are only to acknowledge him as your commodore, and take an oath that you will not betray him or his band."

"Did I accept, señorita, I would never betray those with whom I allied myself; but, though I wear the garb of a convict, and am now a fugitive from the land that gave me birth, and its laws, I know in my own heart that I am guiltless of crime, and I will not sink to the level of the guilty, and brand myself with the name of pirate," and Neil Morgan spoke most warmly.

"Not even to save your own life?"

"No, lady—not even to save my life."

"Remember, you now wear the brand of infamy, the garb of a felon, and you are so believed, even though guiltless in your own heart, and the stigma of pirate is no worse."

"It is a stigma which I will not voluntarily assume when I know that I am innocent."

"You have a life of adventure before you, riches and rank, even if it is won on a pirate's deck."

"And with it the damning thoughts that such a life must bring. No, no! the brand I now wear is black enough, with the knowledge of my being innocent, without the stain of piracy with the feeling that I am guilty."

"And you refuse any terms I may offer, señor?"

"I do, señorita."

"You know the alternative?"

"Death, you said, I believe," was the calm response.

"Yes, death at the yard-arm of the brig."

"I shall not flinch from my doom, be it what it may, señorita."

"Señor, El Moro knows no mercy, and you must die," said Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon, as she arose to leave the cabin, and her words could not but strike a knell in the sailor convict's heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

EL MORO'S OATH.

"FATHER, the prisoner refuses to accept your terms."

"I am very sorry, but he will not turn pirate."

The remark was made by Lady Lulu, to her father, as the two sat in their cabin ashore, the night following the maiden's interview with Neil Morgan on board the Winged Tigris.

The Corsair Commodore was in a good humor with himself, and the world in general, for the booty accumulated by the band, during his long absence, had been looked over, with what had been taken by his renegade lieutenant, and which had been sent ashore from the brig to the store-house, and both surpassed his expectations.

Then an examination of his fortifications, the camps and approaches to his stronghold, showed him that he held a position that was almost impregnable to any ordinary force, and a large vessel could not run into the inlet, so he had nothing to fear from a ship of the line.

Again, the men had found that the Mexican schooner had sunk upon a sand-shoal, where she could be readily raised, and they had set to work with such good will that the prospects were she would be raised, refitted and ready for sea in a couple of weeks.

Toward evening the absent schooner, which the Corsair Commodore had named the Retribution, came into the basin, having a Cuban craft known as a *goleta* as a prize, and on board of which was a valuable cargo.

Under these combinations of fortunate circumstances, the Lion of the Lagoon was in a good humor.

But the moment that Lady Lulu made the report that she did, he showed his teeth and said sternly:

"Then he shall die."

"Has he wronged you in any way, father?" quietly asked Lulu.

"No!" was the abrupt reply.

"Did you not say something about his having saved your life?"

"He saved the convict ship in a storm."

"And you being on board, of course he saved your life, father, with the others."

"Yes; but why do you take this interest in that young man, Lulu?"

"Because I would not see him die, when he has done nothing worthy of death."

"Bah! he would betray us, had he the power and opportunity."

"You only suspect that he would, father."

"I believe it, and he is one to fear, and hence I intend to rid myself of him."

"Why not set him free, and warn him never to come here again?"

"He would return with an American fleet, and they would give us no rest, and perhaps destroy us."

"I do not believe he would do this, father."

"Why, child, I believe you are half in love with the fellow as was a young girl on the prison ship."

Lulu's face crimsoned, but she asked quickly:

"A young girl on the convict ship?"

"Yes."

"Was she a convict, father?"

"Oh, no! she was the daughter of an English officer, the commandant of the fort in the colony to which we were going, and she was going out with her mother and cousin, as I thought I had told you, to join her father."

"Was she pretty?"

"She was as beautiful a being as I ever saw, Lulu, though I will except yourself, ay, and your mother, Heaven rest her soul, poor woman!"

"But her beauty was of a different type from yours, as she was fair, a perfect blonde, with lustrous blue eyes, while you are a brunette, as was your mother."

"You have said that my mother was a lady, father?"

"Yes, of the best blood in the land, and her people cast her off for marrying a poor English sailor, for I was a mate then on a merchant craft; but she loved me and clung to my fortunes, even after I took to piracy, and she gave

me her blessing when she died, and, Lulu, when I buried her that night in the sea, I would have gladly sprung down into the depths to die with her, but for you, my child, whom she left to my love and keeping."

The pirate spoke earnestly, and with an emotion that showed, whatever his evil life had been, the love for his wife had been true through all, and her image, in his daughter, was the idol of his heart.

Seeing him in this mood, Lulu said pleadingly:

"Father, I beg you, by the love you held for my mother and now hold for me, to let that young prisoner go free."

The Corsair Commodore sprung to his feet, and while his eyes blazed, he cried:

"Lulu, did you ever know me to break my oath, be it for good or bad?"

"No, father."

"Well, I have sworn by the cross, if that man, Neil Morgan, refused my terms, he should die, and here I repeat my oath that he shall hang within the week, so do not speak again to me of him, or I will believe that you are in love with him."

"I will not plead for him again, father," was the quiet response, and just then a peon messenger arrived at the cabin bearing a note addressed to:

"THE SENORITA,

"LADY LULU."

The maiden took the paper, broke the seal, and read:

"SENORITA:—One who warned you of danger awhile since, now begs that you honor him with an interview to-night at the *motte* one league from your prairie camp."

"Let the messenger return your answer."

There was no signature, but Lulu seemed to recognize the messenger and know the writing, and she said simply, while she placed a golden *onza* in the peon's palm:

"Say that I will be there."

The peon darted away, while El Moro asked somewhat impatiently:

"Well, Lulu, what is it?"

"Ah, father, I have acted of late so thoroughly alone, I forgot that you should share my secrets; it is a letter from Colonel Rublo, asking me to meet him to-night in the *motte* a league from the prairie camp."

"And you said that you would go?"

"Certainly, father, for it may be to give me another warning."

"It may, and it may not; but Rublo, though I would see you his wife, as you would stand among the best ladies in the land, is as sly as a fox, and I would not trust him, for, with you in his power, he could get from you a king's ransom, if he so chose, before he would give you up."

"Father, when I last met Colonel Rublo, I had within call a dozen of *Bandero's vaqueros*, and I shall again go prepared for treachery, should he attempt such."

"Shall I not accompany you?"

"Oh, no, for I believe he would gladly get you into his power, as the price on your head alone would pay all of his gambling-debts, and it is best that he still believes that I am in full power here."

"Well, I know the man, so let me give you a bag of gems, that you may go well prepared to purchase silence still on his part."

Half an hour after, Lulu had crossed the basin in a boat, and mounting her pony was riding along the swamp causeway toward the camp of the prairie bandits.

Arriving there, she was greeted by Captain *Bandero*, a handsome young Mexican with a reckless, dissipated face, who conducted her to his fortified camp and offered her refreshments.

Declining his hospitality, Lulu said:

"Señor Captain, I go to the *motte*, one league to the south from here, to meet a messenger who I expect brings me important tidings; but I do not wish to go unprotected, so let some of your best men follow me."

"Lady Lulu, I will send half a score of my Indian runners."

"They are brave, and can creep near the *motte* in the long grass without being seen, so if there is any treachery intended, they will be on hand to thwart it."

The maiden thanked *Bandero*, and mounting her horse set out across the prairie just at sunset.

She rode slowly, and a new moon soon lighted her way, while glancing back toward the camp she saw a number of dark forms following close upon her trail.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR LOVE OF GOLD.

As Lady Lulu drew near the clump of timber, looking like an island in the sea, in the broad expanse of prairie, she turned in her saddle and glanced behind her.

She saw that the dark forms that had been following her had disappeared, as soon as they drew near enough to be within the vision of any one looking out from the timber; but she well

knew that they were creeping along in the grass, out of sight, and would be within call should she need them.

The moon was yet some distance above the horizon, and being several days old gave a good light upon the prairie, though all was dark within the little copse of trees.

Drawing rein, as though not caring to venture into the dark recesses of the woods, the Lady Lulu saw a horseman at once ride out of the shadow and come toward her.

"It is Colonel Rublo, and he has been watching for me," she said, and as he drew nearer and raised his hat politely, she said pleasantly:

"Well, señor, I am here according to promise, though this is a lonely spot to ask a young girl to meet you."

"I dared not do otherwise, señorita, for I am known, doubtless, to many of your people, so would not venture there," was the answer of the Mexican.

He was a man with a dark, stern face, wore his hair long, and dressed with the devotion to his toilet that a dandy might have shown.

Past thirty-eight years of age, he yet had a youthful appearance, and possessed a form that was soldierly in bearing, above the medium height of men of his race, and looked the athlete that he was.

A gambler, a spendthrift, he was at the head of the Secret Service of his Government, and yet he was infatuated with the Lady Lulu, a woman whom he should have made a prisoner; he was also pressed so hard by his debts that he was compelled to accept hush-money from a pirate whom he should have hanged.

Believed to possess vast wealth, he was a man who could have married well, yet what love he held in his heart was bestowed upon a fair outlaw.

"Why did you send for me, señor?" asked Lulu, quietly.

"Lady, it was to serve you that I did so, for another move is intended against your stronghold by sea, and I am ordered to Vera Cruz to fit out two vessels-of-war to proceed against you."

"We do not fear a dozen vessels, señor, such as your Government can send against us."

"Still, lady, it is best that they be sent not to attack you, and I could plot but one way to avert it."

"And what is that way, señor?"

"To have the vessel fall into your hands."

"Ah! can this be done?" quickly asked the maiden.

"It can, señorita."

"You will tell me how?"

"Yes, lady, though I dislike exceedingly to make known to you a plot which I had formed, yet could not carry out for lack of funds."

"Do not allow that to disturb you in the least, Colonel Rublo, for what money may be needed I can furnish," was the reply.

"Well, Lady Lulu, my plot is to go to Vera Cruz, purchase the vessels, equip them fully, and then ship a crew."

"I will have to take Mexican officers, some score in number; but the crew I must buy up to mutineer, when at sea, and, after setting their commanders ashore, to run the vessels into your harbor, and join forces with you."

"A good idea, señor, and one which will delight my father exceedingly."

"Ah! has your father then returned?" asked the Mexican, quickly.

"Yes, señor, after a long absence he is again at the stronghold, and he is fitting out a most formidable piratical fleet, so will be glad of the other vessels you refer to."

"But, Lady Lulu, it will cost a small fortune to buy these men off, as I will ship over a hundred, and each man will demand half a hundred *onzas* of gold, if not more."

"Here, Colonel Rublo, in this purse you will find gems that will amply pay all outlays which you may have to make."

"Take them, please, and if you need more you have only to send your peon messenger and ask it."

"Ah, señorita, were I but able to pay the sum needed, gladly would I do so for your sweet sake; but, alas! I am but a poor officer, as you know, though I have a heart that is rich in love for you."

"This is a business meeting, my dear colonel, so no love-making, I pray you," lightly said Lulu.

"I would not offend, lady; but I hope the day is not far distant when I can claim you as my wife, and take you out of the wild, daring life you lead."

"You have but to call me to your side when you would make me thus blessed and the happiest man in Mexico."

"Señor, a colonel of Mexico should not seek to wed a pirate's daughter," was the cold response.

"I love you, lady, even though you be a pirate's daughter, and I beg you give me hope."

"Wait! that is all I can say now."

"Good-night, señor, and I shall look for the vessels before very long, and if they wish not to receive a warm welcome, let them come under the Red Hand flag of the Pirates of the Lagoon," and not waiting for a reply, Lulu wheeled her

horse quickly and darted away, while Colonel Rublo looked after her for some time in silence.

Then he wheeled his horse and rode back into the timber, muttering to himself:

"A king's ransom she gave me in this precious little purse, and it will put me upon my feet again as regards my debts, and by the time I get over head and ears in debt again her old father will have captured booty enough for me to marry her, for she must have a fortune of a million to support me.

"Aha! how I will make the men envious and the women stare when I carry her to Mexico city as my bride.

"Where did you get her, colonel?" will be the question I am constantly called upon to answer.

"Oh, she's the daughter of a wealthy old ranchero," I will answer, and this will be all the satisfaction they will get—egad! it will be all that I dare give.

"Well, well! I'll marry a pirate's daughter for a pirate's plunder, and take my conscience under my arm and keep it there.

"Now to go to Vera Cruz and fit out those vessels, and let me see how I shall plot to let El Moro capture them, for the more ships he has, the more booty he will run down.

"Ah! I have it! I will merely put a couple of officers and a working crew on board, and send them under a pilot, whom I will purchase, to a certain point on the coast, where he is to meet the other officers and men.

"Of course this will turn out as I wish it, for it shall, if I have to pay out a hundred *onzas*, which I can readily spare."

Thus mused the Mexican, whom love of gold and extravagance had made a traitor to his Government to benefit himself, and who, in plotting his own fortune, was willing that his country should be the sufferer thereby.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLAYING A DOUBLE GAME.

"WELL, father, I think I shall arrange to run up to Vera Cruz," said Lady Lulu, after returning from her meeting upon the prairie with Colonel Christo Rublo.

"Why, my child, what has put this into your head?" asked El Moro.

"Oh, I have been there several times on business while you were absent, and I think I can accomplish a good purpose by going."

"In what way?"

"I can add to your fleet."

"Ah! but how?"

"I have not formed my plans yet, father."

"But did you see Colonel Rublo?"

"I did, sir."

"You were asleep when I returned last night, so I would not disturb you to ask the result of your meeting."

"Well, father, it was satisfactory, for an expedition is ordered against us, and it can be thwarted."

"Ha! Rublo told you this?"

"Yes."

"When does it start?"

"Very soon."

"Rublo can prevent it?"

"No, father, he cannot prevent it, but he may aid us in another way."

"And your going to Vera Cruz has something to do with this?"

"Yes, father; for I will then know just what to expect; as I will have to defend the stronghold, I wish to be able to do so."

"You go to sea within two or three weeks, and we must depend upon our forts and prairie camp to defend us, and they will be able to keep off a foe vastly superior, I am sure; but by going to Vera Cruz I can arrange with some trusty spy there to keep me informed of any attack by sea, while Colonel Rublo will certainly notify me of any approach by land, and we need not live in dread."

"Well, my child, you have done so well in my absence, and taken matters so thoroughly in your own hands, that I leave all to you, except the management of the fleet."

"Thank you, sir; but what date have you appointed for execution day?"

"I find there is no use waiting longer with a view to Neil Morgan's changing his mind, as I had another talk with him last night, and he coolly told me to hang him at my pleasure, as he would rather die now with a clear conscience than live a pirate."

"He is immensely plucky."

"He is, indeed; but I will trifle no longer, so to-morrow afternoon at sunset he shall be strung up along with three other men aboard ship whom I have sentenced to die."

"That the band may understand that I intend to stand no trifling, will you allow me to command the executions?"

"Certainly, Lulu, if you so wish it; but you have grown strangely cruel and callous of late."

"Is it any wonder that I have become so with the life I lead?"

The pirate chief winced at this and made no reply, while Lulu continued:

"I shall start for Vera Cruz then to-morrow night, going in my own *goleta* with my peon crew, as I did before, and the band need not know that I am absent."

"As you think best, Lulu, for you are a thor-

ough sailor, and your peons are true as gold to you; but I wish you would give me a better idea of just what you intend doing in the town."

"I cannot tell, father, hardly knowing myself; but I believe I can accomplish much by going."

"You know best; but you will not be gone long?"

"Oh, no, I shall return at the earliest moment that I can; but will you give orders aboard the brig that I am to command the execution?"

"Yes," and the Corsair Commodore arose from his breakfast, which meal the two had been discussing during the foregoing conversation, and walked away to attend to his duties, for he had his men working day and night upon the sunken schooner.

As he sprung into his yawl, to have his peon boat's crew row him to the scene of work, he muttered:

"How strange it is that my child holds such an influence over me."

"Why, she really is chief here, and I yield to her unasked; but I do not like this freak of hers to overlook this execution, as I do not wish to feel that she has become utterly heartless."

When El Moro returned to the cabin to dinner, he sought to urge Lulu not to have aught to do with the execution of the four unfortunates; but she coolly told him that she had notified them all of their coming doom on the morrow, and ordered preparations made on board the brig accordingly.

El Moro said no more and soon after returned to his work, while Lulu walked back along the ridge to a little hut built far back in the forest, and situated upon a narrow cliff overhanging the water far below.

A strong chain and lock were upon the door, but taking out a key she unlocked it and threw it open.

A man sat within loaded with irons.

He had a face that was brutal in the extreme, but a form that was tall, slender and perfect.

He was a Mexican of the lower order, and villain and cut-throat were engraven upon every feature of his face.

He had been the worst member of the band, had taken life ruthlessly in several instances, until Lady Lulu had ordered him to be shot, but he appealed so earnestly to see a priest before he died that she allowed his execution to be deferred until an opportunity occurred.

In the brig had come a priest, one picked up at sea in an open boat and the only survivor of a wrecked vessel which the Winged Tigress had nearly run down one night.

The padre had been kept on board the brig, El Moro determined to land him at some port, when he again put to sea, and Lulu had seen him, and asked him to absolve the unfortunates who were to be executed, and he had promised to do so.

As she entered the cabin the wretch glared ferociously upon her, and muttered some words that sounded like the growling of an angry bear.

"Pedro, I have come to tell you that there is a padre in the camp, and you can see him ere you lie."

"There are to be other unfortunates executed to-morrow at sunset, and you shall die then, so make what peace you can, for your guilty soul, with your God."

A muttered curse was the only response, and Lulu left the cabin, and following a narrow path running down the abrupt side of the ridge, she soon reached the shore of the basin.

There was a camp there of two small huts, and seven peons were gathered about a log, playing cards.

They were a bold, fine-looking set, and sprung to their feet as she approached them.

"Zuma, I wish you to have the *goleta* stored for a ten days' cruise, and in thorough condition, for I sail to-morrow night."

"Yes, señorita," answered the man she addressed, and who was a handsome young peon, attired in sailor garb.

"And to-night I wish you to go up to the prison-hut on the bluff, and get the prisoner there, Pedro, and carry him on board the brig, and into the cabin."

"Disguise him as well as you can, and I will be there to receive him, as soon as it is dark."

"Yes, lady."

"And, Zuma, do not refer to this in any way."

"My lips are sealed when you command, lady," answered Zuma, and the maiden walked away, following the curving shore of the basin.

Just before sunset she sprung into her skiff and went on board the brig.

The eavesdropping lieutenant, the only officer on board, received her at the gangway, and merely nodding at his profound salutation, she asked:

"Señor, is the padre on board?"

"Yes, Lady Lulu, for your father gave orders that he was not to go ashore."

"Where is he?"

"In the ward-room, señorita, for he messes with me."

"I would see him in the cabin in just ten minutes."

"Yes, lady."

"And the prisoner, the sailor convict?"

"Is in the cabin state-room, according to your orders."

"There are other prisoners on board awaiting execution?"

"Yes, lady, three poor devils."

"They are to die at sunset to-morrow."

"As you say, lady, it shall be."

"As I sent you word this morning, I will command the execution myself, and make all arrangements."

"It is a task I am happy to be released from, lady."

"I shall have the four men confined in the cabin until the time of their execution, and Zuma, my peon boatman and two of his crew shall guard them and look to their comfort."

"I can see to that, lady."

"I will not trouble you, señor, and more, not any one save the padre shall enter the cabin, and I will so give orders to Zuma, for their last hours shall be passed in peace."

And Lulu went on into the cabin, where Neil Morgan sat, still heavily ironed.

He arose at the entrance of the maiden and bowed.

"You are still firm, señor?" she asked.

"In my resolve not to turn pirate, you mean, lady?"

"Yes, señor."

"I am."

"To-morrow night at sunset is the hour appointed for you to die."

"So be it, lady," was the unmoved response.

Lulu was silent for some minutes, and several times appeared about to speak, but checked herself.

Then she said:

"Señor, will you promise to obey me implicitly, without hesitation, in any request I may make of you before to-morrow night?"

"I cannot pledge myself to become a pirate, lady."

"I will not ask it."

"Then anything else you request I will gladly do."

"Thank you, señor; now we are to have a visitor, a priest, and I wish you to be surprised at nothing that may occur."

"Yonder state-room I will have you removed to to-night, and I have ordered that three other unfortunates, that are to be executed, be brought to the cabin, to here remain until their execution."

Neil Morgan bowed, but made no reply, and just then the priest entered.

He was a Spaniard, and possessed a kindly face, full of intelligence and character.

He bowed to Lulu, and then to Neil Morgan, and his face showed that he was impressed with the appearance of both, while he said:

"Do I address the Lady Lulu?"

"Yes, holy father."

"I was told that you wished to speak with me, lady."

"Yes, padre, I wished to say to you that there are four unfortunates to be executed to-morrow at sunset, and I have ordered that they be kept in this cabin, to which you are given free access, that you may give them what comfort you can."

"Gladly will I do so, my daughter, and it speaks a kind heart in you that you wish it so."

"This señor is not of your church, holy padre; but I feel that you can befriend him."

"I would also say that I sail in my *goleta* to-morrow night, leaving just after the execution, and I will be glad to take you to Vera Cruz, if you so wish it."

"Gladly would I depart, lady, for here, under the shadows of a black flag, I can do my fellow-men no good, and I would return to my parish at New Orleans, where I was going when our vessel was caught in a tornado and wrecked."

"Permit me to ask you to accept this as a *souvenir* of your coming here, and a reminder that all are not wholly evil, even in a pirate camp," and she slipped into the hand of the padre a paper, and immediately left the cabin.

The pirate officer was not near the companion-way as she came on deck, the shot so near his head on a former occasion having proven a good lesson.

Returning to the shore, Lulu occupied herself in various ways for the remainder of the day; but her father found her blue and little inclined to talk when he returned after dark from working at the sunken ship.

She retired early, and the next morning appeared in the same gloomy mood; but after dinner she was quite cheerful, and told him that all arrangements were completed for the execution.

"I will leave work and be on time, my child," said the Corsair.

"No, father, you need not, for I shall summon the people in the camp to the fort to view the execution from there, and have Captain Bandero march his men to the opposite shore, so that all will witness it, excepting those who are at work upon the schooner."

"I cannot spare those men, Lulu, for I wish to get her up before a storm breaks and undoes what we have done; but I can come."

"I would rather prefer that you would not,

that the people may know how thoroughly you leave to me the command ashore."

"As you please, my child; but that convict is still stubborn, I suppose!"

"Yes, father, and I have given up trying to urge him to save his life as you have wished him to do, so let him die with the others."

"There will be four to die then?"

"Yes, father."

"Well, Lulu, I leave all to you," and El Moro again went down the inlet to his work.

As he departed from the cabin Lady Lulu called after him:

"Father, I will take the padre with me to Vera Cruz, as you said was best, and will stop at the schooner on my way out to see you."

"Yes, I had forgotten that you sailed to-night," and after a few minutes' longer conversation with his daughter El Moro departed, while Lulu began to pace to and fro, her face paling and flushing by turns, and her manner that of one that was lost in deep and painful meditation.

Thus the time passed away until a knock came at the door.

It was Duluth, come to ask if the band should be then mustered in the fort for execution.

"Yes, and signal Captain Bandero to come to the shore with his men, and the Señor Del Norte to call his crew to quarters in Fort Trap," was the answer.

Duluth would have tarried for a longer talk with the girl whom he so madly loved, but there was a look in her face that forbade it, and he walked away muttering:

"What does it mean, that Lulu should seek to become the executioner of those poor wretches?"

"She is certainly becoming cruel; but still I love her, ay, and she shall yet be my wife."

Having dismissed Duluth, Lulu called to a peon girl, who acted as her slave, and left the cabin, taking the path leading to the camp of her *goleta's* crew.

The peon girl, Zuma, took up a roll of luggage and followed after her mistress.

"Is all in readiness, Pedro?" she asked of one of the five peons who stood on the shore, where the *goleta*, a beautiful little craft of thirty tons lay moored to a rock.

"Yes, Lady Lulu."

Springing on board the *goleta*, Pedro and his shipmates shoved off, and seizing the long sweeps it was sent rapidly toward the brig a couple of cable-lengths distant.

It was just sunset when the *goleta* ran alongside of the brig.

The pirate lieutenant was there to meet her, and the dozen men on board had the four ropes rove for hanging the doomed quartette, and all were awaiting the coming of the beautiful girl who was to issue the command that launched the wretched victims into eternity.

"Lady, the padre requests that the doomed men have their faces hidden by a black cap," said the pirate officer.

"It is better so, señor; I will see to it," was the calm reply, and Lulu entered the cabin.

A short time she was absent, and when she returned the sun had set.

One glance around showed her that the crews on the vessels in the basin were at their posts to witness the execution, and that in the two forts the people were on the alert, while a group of horsemen, the band of Captain Bandero, were gathered upon the causeway close to the shore of the basin.

From the cabin came the sound of the padre's voice in prayer for the doomed men, and Lulu stood with bowed head until it ceased.

Then she called out, in a clear voice that had not a quiver in it:

"Zuma, bring forth the prisoners and let them meet the fate to which they have been doomed, and may Heaven have mercy upon them!"

Then up from the cabin came the padre, holding his cross above his head, and two by two came the four victims, with Zuma and his two peon comrades acting as a guard.

The good padre had generously shut the faces of the doomed men from view, by drawing over them four black caps that reached to their shoulders, but from beneath were heard their muttered prayers.

With hands ironed behind them, and feet in shackles, they were slowly led by the padre to the spot where each was to stand, while Zuma coolly adjusted the noose about their necks, the other end of each rope being held by four pirate seamen.

White as though life had left her veins, Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon, stood upon the quarter-deck watching the fading light from the west, and awaiting when all was in readiness, that she might give the command that would hurl four souls into eternity, and upon all rested a silence that was appalling, for even the birds in the forest-lined shores had ceased their songs.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GOLETA SETS SAIL.

THE impressive moment before the execution of the four victims on board of the pirate brig was felt even by the hardy outlaws who gazed

upon the scene from near and far, and whose days were passed in deeds of carnage.

There was something about the balmy winds, the gathering darkness, the silence of the hour, and the four men, with their faces hidden beneath black caps, that made all feel what was taking place, and even the peons, indifferent by nature, were nervous under the presence of what was transpiring.

From some strange motive, Lulu the Lioness had asked her father to allow her to command the execution, and he had consented, though he could not understand why she had become so callous, when but a year before she had been all gentleness and sympathy.

Determined to carry out the affair in a manner that would be a lesson to all the wild spirits about her, Lady Lulu, as the reader has seen, had made every arrangement to have no break or accident occur.

Standing upon the deck of the Winged Tigress, face to face with her awful duty, she did not shrink an atom, and only her white, stern face showed that she suffered deeply.

She watched the peons as they adjusted the nooses about the necks of the doomed men, counted the men at the other end of the rope who were to drag them up into the air, and then turned her gaze upon the padre, who stood with his cross upraised, chanting the prayers for those upon the threshold of death.

She saw that the four stood heavily ironed, two of them shivering as though with ague, and the other two firm as iron, though one was muttering prayers for his soul.

All eyes now glanced toward Lady Lulu, and she saw that the moment had come, and loud, clear as a trumpet and without a tremor, her voice gave the command:

"Up with them! and Heaven forgive their sins!"

"Amen!" broke from the padre's lips earnestly, and with a drag, as one man, upon the ropes, the pirate seamen hauled the doomed quartette into mid-air.

"Make fast your ropes!" cried Lady Lulu, and the four rope-ends were made fast, leaving the ghastly forms dangling at the other end, and dying.

"Señor Lieutenant, I shall take the men on board the *goleta*, and cast them into the sea when I get outside, for I go to Vera Cruz to-night."

"Kindly get me some extra canvas from the brig's store-room," and Lulu turned to the pirate officer who hastened forward to obey her order as he had the key of the store lockers.

As he went forward the priest passed down into the cabin, and the peons came aft, and several bundles were transferred from the brig to the *goleta*, and sail was set by Zuma and his crew.

"All ready, Lady Lulu," called out the *goleta's* peon sailing-master, and just then the lieutenant approached, accompanied by two seamen bearing rolls of canvas.

"Those men are dead, Zuma; let the bodies down and put them on board the *goleta*, to be thrown into the sea when we run out," ordered the maiden, and the order was promptly obeyed, the padre placing his hand upon the pulse of each to see that life was extinct.

"Now, Señor Padre, as you are to be my passenger, I am ready," and Lady Lulu turned to the priest, who bowed and sprung down upon the deck of the *goleta*.

"Adios, señor," and waving her hand to the pirate lieutenant, Lady Lulu followed the priest, while Zuma ordered his men to cast off.

The wind was light, but blew fair for the run down the inlet, and feeling its impulse the *goleta* sped away at a speed that was remarkable.

At the helm sat Lady Lulu, following the winding of the channel with a skill that showed long study of its dangers, and opposite to her sat the priest, watching her with admiration as she guided the little vessel on through the darkness, for night had now fallen.

Crouching in the roomy cockpit was Zuma, the peon maid, and amidsthips, lying upon the deck, were Zuma, the sailing-master, and his crew of six men.

Forward of the foremast, lying in a heap upon the deck, were the four dead men, a piece of canvas having been thrown over them to shut out the ghastly sight.

Passing through the narrows, between the two forts, the *goleta* rocked gently upon the waters of the broad inlet, and ahead of her half a league came in view a group of bright lights, that seemed to be dancing upon the waves.

Toward these lights Lady Lulu held her way, and soon ran near and luffed up into the wind.

There were a group of boats there, lashed together, and three-score men were hard at work raising the sunken Mexican schooner-of-war.

El Moro was busy superintending the work but hailed the *goleta* with:

"Ho, Lulu, are you off for Vera Cruz?"

"Yes, father."

"And how went the execution on the Winged Tigress?"

"All went off well, father."

"I was of half a mind to run up with my men here to witness it, as I desire all to understand that I will have no trifling in the band; but we

are getting the schooner so well up that I remained, hoping to have her afloat by morning."

"All went off well, father, though you were not there."

"And how died Morgan, the convict?"

"He was unmoved, sir."

"Oh, he had nerve I knew; but I am glad it is over."

"And the padre?"

"I am here, señor, to speak for myself, and I thank you for giving me my freedom," answered the priest.

"Oh, you are welcome, Señor Padre, for pirates though we are, we do not war against men of your cloth."

"I wish you well, Señor Padre, and Lady Lulu will give you a few golden *onzas* for a prayer or two in my behalf, for they will do me no harm."

"I thank you, señor, and I shall pray that you may be turned from your wicked ways, for I am to bury the four dead men out at sea."

"Ah! have you the bodies with you, Lulu?" cried El Moro, quickly.

"Yes, father, I thought it best to throw them overboard in deep water, and not have them cast ashore in the basin."

"You are very thoughtful, child, but you better not tarry longer, for good weather may not last you, and I do not wish you to be caught in a blow before you reach port."

"Adios, father; I will return soon, so do not be anxious regarding me," and letting the *goleta* fall off to the wind, Lady Lulu again guided her upon her way seaward.

Passing through the narrow channel into the inlet, Lulu held on until she had dropped the land a league astern, and then headed along the coast, while she said:

"Señor Padre, we may as well now bury the dead."

"Yes, my daughter," was the reply, and the *goleta* was laid to, and the padre said a few prayers over the dead, as the bodies, one by one, were launched into the sea, each one sewn up in a canvas shroud and with a heavy shot attached to sink them to the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEW JACOBS.

AFTER leaving the "prairie island," where he had held his interview with Lady Lulu, Colonel Christo Rublo made his way to the camp of his lanceros, and took up his march for Vera Cruz.

As he went along he revolved in his mind certain plots which presented themselves for deceiving his Government and at the same time aiding the Lion of the Lagoon, for he felt assured that every dollar the Corsair Commodore laid by in treasure would eventually come to him through his marriage with the pirate's daughter, as the reader is aware it was his intention to wed the fair outlaw maiden.

Having arrived in Vera Cruz, and quartered the lancero guard which he brought with him, Colonel Rublo sought the luxurious rooms, where he was wont to make his home when visiting the town.

Having made himself comfortable, Colonel Rublo sent out for the officers whom he needed to aid him in fitting out the two schooners which he was to purchase, and was glad to find that there were a couple of American craft there in port that could be secured.

They were trim-built, fleet, and just what he needed, so he set his subordinates to work to rig, arm and equip them in a manner that would make them most formidable.

At the same time he ordered an officer to secure a crew for each vessel, and as a great deal of secrecy was needed, to prevent the discovery of their destination, he made up his mind that they should meet the vessels at an isolated point on the coast, and thus the spies, which he knew were watching for the coming on board of their seamen, would be thrown wholly off their guard.

"The schooners can put to sea under an officer and just enough men to man them, and under cover of the darkness, and then proceed, under a reliable pilot, to the point on the coast where I will have the balance of the officers and crews awaiting them."

"Once on board, they can go on to their destination."

So said Colonel Rublo to his subordinates, while one asked:

"And that destination, Señor Colonel?"

"You will not know, sir, until you are well at sea, for you sail under sealed orders, as the move in hand must not be anticipated by our foes through having leaked out."

This placed a mystery upon the proceedings, but the officers dared not question a man further who stood as near the Government as did Colonel Christo Rublo, and then were compelled to depart with their curiosity unsatisfied.

Having begun work in a satisfactory way, the gallant colonel determined to enjoy himself for the time being that he would remain in the city of Vera Cruz.

"I have been here three days," he muttered, "and not a night or day have I been able to chance my fortune against monté."

"I will do so to-night; but first I will go to Jew Jacobs and see just what my gems are worth that the fair Lulu gave me."

With this determination, Colonel Rublo sought a quiet part of the city, where in a narrow street dwelt a man who was sneeringly spoken of as "Jew Jacobs," but who possessed a vast deal of power, the bottom of which was the golden chain with which he held bound nearly every Government official.

Jew Jacobs lived in a rambling old stucco abode, which the superstitious Mexicans said was haunted.

It had once been the palace of a former governor of the town, and a massacre had occurred there one night, when the soldiers arose against their cruel master and put over three-score of the household to death.

Then it became a monastery, and the Indians one stormy night had raided the town and the pious inmates had fallen beneath their tomahawks.

For a long time the old structure had remained deserted after this, but the town building about it, it had been taken by the *alcade* for a prison, and thus had it served for years, many a poor wretch having died within its walls in anguish, and scores having been executed in the "justice hall."

But when a military governor took charge of the town, he removed the prison to a more desirable locality, and the "haunted citadel," as the old structure was called, became deserted excepting by the bats, ghosts and rats which were said to nightly make the place resound with strange sounds, scaring off any one from going near it after sunset.

It was large, rambling, two-storied in several places, and with a tower in the center and at the ends of the two wings, rising thirty feet above the roof.

Within was a plaza, and where the front of the building was upon the street from each wing started an adobe wall ten feet in height, and incircling a space of a couple of acres in the rear formed a delightful garden, which was adorned with trees and shrubbery.

The windows of the place had iron grating in them, and the whole structure from without was grand, gloomy, and looked the picture of ruin and desolation.

In this way it had been when Jew Jacobs's eye had fallen upon it, and somehow he took a fancy to it, and asked its price.

A mere song was named, for the owner had no desire to hold stock in ghostly ruins, whose occupants were rats by day and owls, bats and spoons by night.

So the Jew moved into his new home, as soon as he made one wing habitable, and put the garden into an enjoyable promenading-place.

People shook their heads at his foolhardiness, but Jew Jacobs said he was more afraid of the living than the dead, and his household, of a daughter, a clerk and two servants, seemed in no way disturbed by their gloomy surroundings.

From whence came Jew Jacobs no one seemed to know, and exactly what language he claimed as his own, after Hebrew, was not known, for French, German, English and Spanish he spoke with equal ease.

He made a shop in one wing of the building, and hung out three gilt balls from beneath a sign which had evidently seen service before, as it was worn and dingy, and swung to and fro with a creaking sound like the wail of a lost spirit, and which was strangely in keeping with the weird surroundings.

The sign read simply:

JACOBS,
LOAN OFFICE.

There was a chapel and cemetery opposite to the Haunted Citadel, so that Jacobs the Jew had no busybodies to overlook his shop, and the houses upon the streets surrounding the high wall of the garden, were too low to overlook the grounds, unless one went upon the roofs, and this few did.

Hardly had Jew Jacobs hung out his sign, when custom poured in, and so great was the rush of business that he remarked to Israel, his young clerk:

"Israel, dere was so mooch pizziness right away quick, I va t'inks t'e beoples was all proke."

Before he had been long in the town Jew Jacobs was said to hold "souvenirs" from every household almost, and he was set down as fabulously rich, if all the "collateral security" stored away in the old house could be turned into gold at half value.

It was to this shop in the Hunted Citadel that colonel Rublo made his way, after leaving his comfortable quarters.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COLONEL AND THE JEW.

COLONEL RUBLO was pretty well known in Vera Cruz, but, considered a man of vast wealth, and being identified with the Secret Service of the Government, he was allowed to go unquestioned anywhere, while he was feared by all who had a guilty conscience.

It was just after twilight that he turned from a busy street into the deserted one in which was the shop of Jew Jacobs.

Israel was lighting the swinging-lamp outside,

more from habit than from an expectation that it would bring customers, for after nightfall few persons cared to go up that dismal way.

With quick, firm step the Mexican colonel strode along, and soon came to the iron-grated door of the shop, which Israel had closed, taking his stand within.

"Ah, Señor Colonel, it is you?" he said, as the Mexican seized the bell-rope.

"Ay, Jew, and I have come to see your master."

"Tell him that Colonel Rublo is here and demands to see him at once," said Colonel Rublo, haughtily.

"I will inform the Señor Jacobs, señor, and will return with word whether he will see you," answered Israel, who was a handsome, fearless-faced young Hebrew of superb physique, and resolution stamped upon his lips.

"If he will see me?"

"Do you know who I am?" thundered the Mexican.

"Certainly, señor; you are Colonel Rublo, of the Mexican Secret Service."

"Ay, and no one dares refuse to see me when I call," was the angry reply.

"The Señor Jacobs will dare refuse, if so it pleases him, señor, for this is not his business hour, for he rests from sunset until an hour after."

"Well, he had better not refuse to see me," was the response, as Israel asked him to take a seat and await his return.

He then disappeared through a door in the rear of the shop, which was a spacious room twenty feet in width and fifty in length, and with shelves upon either side, over which hung heavy curtains, hiding what was held thereon.

A step-ladder was upon either side, with which to reach the upper shelves, and a window, also iron-grated, was upon either side of the door, giving ample light.

Upon the right of the door was a space reserved as an office, eight by ten in size, and containing a desk and couple of chairs.

A brass pole frame ran around this space, with curtains thereon, which could be drawn and thus shut out the interior from the observation of any one in the shop.

At the right of the desk was a rack, containing a couple of muskets, several pistols, a cutlass and rapier, and right at hand for the use of the Jew when seated at his desk.

In a few moments the young Hebrew returned, with the remark:

"Señor Colonel, my master begs to be excused until nine o'clock, when, if it is urgent, he will see you; but if not, he says you will find him in the office after ten in the morning."

"Caramba! is this the message sent me by Jew Jacobs?" cried Colonel Rublo, his face flushing with anger.

"It is, señor."

"Bid him come here at once under pain of my deep anger."

"No, señor, I will disturb the Señor Jacobs no more."

"Then, by the cross, I will see him," and Colonel Rublo attempted to force his way to the door at the back of the shop, when, with the spring of a panther in quickness, Israel had seized the rapier from the rack and confronted the Mexican, while he said, sternly:

"No, Señor Colonel, I stand guard here, and you do not pass."

"Ha! do you dare me with steel, Jew?" and Colonel Rublo drew his weapon and sprung to the attack, having it in his heart to kill the young Jew.

Israel was a fair swordsman, and full of nerve; but the Mexican was noted as the best man with a blade in Mexico, and, amazed by the opposition of the young Jew, and relying upon his power to do as he pleased unquestioned, he had murder in his heart and showed it in his face.

A few lightning-like passes, and the blade of Israel was struck from his hand, and the point of the colonel's sword was about to pierce the heart of the young Jew, when suddenly a grip of iron fell upon the shoulders of the Mexican, and he was hurled across the room, falling heavily, while a stern voice said:

"Coward! would you murder a man wholly at your mercy?"

Colonel Rublo arose like an enraged lion, and with a growl of anger sprung to attack the one who had so opportunely for Israel appeared upon the scene, gliding through the half-open iron door.

But, stooping quickly, the stranger picked up the rapier of Israel and met the attack with a coolness that showed a man of perfect confidence in himself.

With a ring the two blades crossed, and with a skill that amazed Israel, who was ready to rush to the rescue of his preserver, and which astounded the Mexican colonel, the latter was disarmed and he was at the mercy of his adversary.

"Let your defeat cool your blood, sir, for I spare your life, though you would have murdered me as well as this young Hebrew, had it been in your power."

The words were uttered in deep, calm tones, and turning upon his heel the stranger left the

shop just as the door in the rear flew open and in stepped Jacobs, the Jew.

"What means this turmoil beneath my roof?" he demanded sternly, in Spanish.

He was a man of majestic appearance, fully six feet in height, with a long, gray beard and white hair that hung in waving masses upon his shoulders; but there was that in his dark face that seemed to indicate that his frosted locks were premature, for age had not put its imprint upon his features, and his form was erect as an Indian's.

He was dressed in a long, flowing dark robe, somewhat resembling that worn by Mexican padres, and upon his head was a red silk turban, the two adding to his dignity of mien and giving him an imposing look.

"Ho, Jew! you are well come, for I have been insulted by your fellow here, and disarmed by one who came to his aid, and who wields a blade as I believed no man in Mexico could," cried Colonel Rublo, excitedly, for his discomfiture had caused him to lose his usual calm reserve.

"You sought to invade the sanctity of my home, Señor Mexican, and my clerk did his duty in opposing you, and but for the timely entrance of one whom I do not know you would have been a murderer, for I saw all and hastened hither to say if you come with steel in your hand you will find that I can wield a blade, Jew though I be."

"Bah! I was a fool to lose my temper, Jew, and I should not demean myself by crossing swords with men of your race."

"I came here for gold, not steel, and had you seen me as I demanded, there would have been no trouble."

"There shall be no trouble, Colonel Rublo, unless you force it upon me."

"If you wish to see me upon business return after nine o'clock and I will see you, but not before."

"Do you mean that you will not now attend to what business I have with you?"

"I do, señor."

"But you must."

"I have given you my answer, señor."

"Return at nine," and Jacobs, the Jew, coolly turned upon his heel and left the shop, while Colonel Rublo, white with rage, hissed forth:

"By Heaven, Jew, you shall rue this."

Then, with a muttered curse, he dashed his sword into its scabbard and left the shop.

As he did so the white-haired Jew entered and called out:

"Israel, who was the señor that saved your life?"

"I know not, señor."

"Quick! Hasten after him and see if he can be found, for I must know that man, for Gentile though he be he shall find me his friend."

"And I will be his friend, too, señor, for I owe him my life," assured Israel.

"Quick! hasten to find him, while I remain in the shop."

The young Jew seized his hat and dashed out into the street, while the Señor Jacobs sat down in his office and began to look over some papers. One hour thus passed, and Israel returned.

"Did you find him?" eagerly asked the old Jew.

"No, señor, I could not find him anywhere, or learn aught of such a person being seen, was the answer."

"This is strange; but he must be found, for I would know who he is, and why he came here as he did."

"The God of Abraham be praised for guiding his footsteps hither as he did," devoutly said Israel.

Hardly had he uttered the words when a quick step was heard without, and Colonel Rublo appeared in the doorway.

"Israel, you may go now," said the old Jew, and then turning to Colonel Rublo, he continued: "Enter and be seated, señor, and say how I can serve you."

There was no sign of anger in Jacobs, the Jew's face or speech, as he motioned the Mexican to a seat.

"Tell me what these gems are valued at," sternly said the Mexican, and he tossed the purse given him by Lady Lulu, the Lioness, upon the table before the Jew.

Jacobs took a large salver covered with black velvet, and emptied the jewels into it.

His face showed no emotion, but he said admiringly:

"These are rare and selected gems, señor, and you have a fortune in them if they are yours."

"I am not one to hold other people's jewels as you do, Jew."

"Tell me their value, and remember, I know it within a few *onzas*," was the rude remark.

"Then why ask me!" came the quiet question.

"Because I wish you to purchase them."

"Ah! then I will quickly give you their value to me," and taking up his quill pen and a slip of paper, he marked down a valuation on each stone, as he quickly examined it.

"I will give you just thirty thousand *dalerás*,* señor."

* A Spanish dollar in use in America until the coining of the U. S. dollar in 1794.—THE AUTHOR.

"Will you not do better?"

"Though a Jew I have but one price, as you should know, señor," was the sneering response.

"Will you give me that sum besides the ten thousand *daleras* I owe you?"

"No, señor, you must pay your debt, long overdue, out of what I offer you."

"That leaves me but twenty thousand."

"Still less, señor, for you seem to forget my interest."

"Well, I have but to submit to your demands, so give me the money, and the jewels you hold of mine as security for what I owe you."

The Jew calmly set to work, entered in his book the purchase of the gems, scratched off the debt due by the Mexican, added up his interest, and then counted out just eighteen thousand dollars to the colonel, at the same time handing him a morocco case with the remark:

"You will please see, señor, that your jewels are there as you gave them to me."

"Yes, they are all here; now I wish you to do something for me."

"Well, señor?"

"You know the coast pirates?"

"Yes, señor, I know most of them in a business way, for they are sad gamblers when in port, and have often come to me for loans."

"Do you know one you can purchase?"

"How do you mean, señor?"

"One who, if well paid, would pilot a vessel down the coast to a point different from its avowed destination?"

"You mean a man who would make a mistake in a haven?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose, señor?"

"That is none of your business, Jew, nor is it his."

"His duty is to engage as pilot and start down the coast for a given point, with a second vessel following close in his wake."

"He is mistaken in the point of destination, and runs into an inlet which I will name, and, what then follows he will not be responsible for, and more, his life will be in no danger, and he can make his report of what occurs in a way that will not endanger his position with the Government."

"I can secure you such a man, señor."

"Remember, I am not to be known in the affair, and you are to give him his orders, which I will explain to you."

"I understand, Colonel Rublo."

"See that no mistake is made, then, and when you have found your man notify me at my quarters, and you shall have the price to pay him," and without another word Colonel Rublo left the Jew's shop and wended his way rapidly down the dark and deserted street back to his rooms.

But close upon his heels followed a man who evidently was dogging his steps, but meant not to be seen by the Mexican officer.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MYSTERIOUS GAMBLER.

THE "Montezuma Palacio" was a gorgeously fitted up *salon* in the city of Vera Cruz, and now-a-days would be known as a "Gambling Hell," for therein were played games of chance by young and old, rich and poor, and "monte" was the *bête noir* of many an unfortunate.

Well would it have been for hundreds had there been above the doors of the Montezuma Palace the motto:

"He that entereth here
Leaveth Hope behind,"

for many, indeed, had gone forth from the gilded rooms, driven to despair by their losses, and those not brave enough to struggle against desperate odds had ended their anguish by a shot in the brain, or a knife in the heart.

It was into this gorgeous retreat that Colonel Christo Rublo wended his way upon leaving his quarters, after having put away his morocco case of jewels. He was a born gambler, was Colonel Rublo, and reveled in a game of chance, and he hoped to win heavily that he might return to the city of Mexico with ample funds to pay his numerous debts, and to enter upon new extravagances.

Upon entering the saloon, nodding to the guard at the door, to whom he was known, the Mexican colonel glanced over the numerous faces present, and recognizing several, bowed in his haughty way, while he passed on to a table where a game was in full progress.

The rooms were certainly deserving the title of "Palace," for they were a mass of gilded beauty upon all sides, and fairly dazzled the eyes of the beholders.

There were present many prominent men of the town, with a mixture of military and naval officers in brilliant uniforms, *caballeros*, *rancheros* and the captains of merchant craft that had put into port.

The chink, chink of gold was heard upon all sides, the smoke of cigars formed a cloud above the heads of the smokers, a hum of voices, with an occasional burst of laughter and an oath arose from the crowd, intermingled with the call of the winning cards by the dealers at the tables.

Selecting a table where a small knot of men

had gathered together to play for heavier stakes than the mass cared to risk, or could afford to do so, Colonel Rublo placed his bets, and fortune favored him, for he won several hundred dollars by the game going in his favor.

In his usual cool, yet reckless way, he placed five hundred dollars upon the turn of a card and again was the winner.

"A thousand this time, señors," he said, quietly.

There were several at the table who withdrew at this run, but three players made an equal bet with the colonel, and again he was the winner.

"Call it five thousand now," he remarked, in his calm way, his dark, handsome face showing no sign of emotion at his winnings.

Again he won, and when he named the very large sum of ten thousand as the stake, the other players withdrew, and he said:

"Must I play against the Palace alone?"

This he said, as without outside players to gamble with, the Palace would have to cover his bets.

No one spoke, and all was deep interest in the saloon now, all centering upon the table at which Colonel Rublo was playing, many of the smaller gamblers ceasing to play to watch one who dared risk such large sums.

The Palace accepted the bet, and again did the Mexican officer win.

Still his face remained wholly unmoved, and those present who had seen him play heavily before, knew that he was not wont to show feeling under triumph or defeat.

"I have seen Rublo play heavily very often, but to-night he is doubling any bet I ever knew him to make," remarked a regular frequenter of the Montezuma Palace.

"He has won a small fortune already," remarked another.

"And will lose it before he goes away from that table; but then he is enormously rich and can afford it," a third remarked.

"I make it twenty thousand this time," Colonel Rublo said, in an off-hand manner.

"Pardon, señor, but the Palace never goes beyond ten thousand on a single bet," the dealer remarked.

"If I reduce my bet, my luck may change, so I will have to stop, I fear, though against my will."

"Permit me to cover the señor's bet," said a low voice near the Mexican, and turning quickly Colonel Rublo beheld a mere youth standing by his side.

"Was it you that addressed me, señor?" he asked, with surprise, gazing upon the youth, who scarcely looked eighteen, for his face was beardless.

"Yes, señor," was the reply, and every eye was turned upon the young man.

He was slightly under the medium height, dressed richly as a *caballero*, and a soft sombrero, richly worked in silver thread, shaded his head, but half concealed a mass of golden curls, which were in strange contrast with his dark complexion.

His form was slender, but wiry, and he wore a jewel-hilted knife and a pair of gold-mounted pistols in his yellow silk sash, while large gold spurs jingled at every movement of his small feet.

"Who is he?" was asked by a score of lips, as all gazed upon one who had coolly offered to cover Colonel Rublo's bet of twenty thousand *daleras*.

"Are you in earnest, señor?" asked the Mexican officer, showing his surprise.

"Assuredly, sir."

"You offer to play me for twenty thousand dollars?"

"Yes, or more if you so desire," was the low but distinct reply.

"I make it a rule, señor, never to play with any one I do not know to be a gentleman," said Colonel Rublo, haughtily.

"Ah! do you think I look otherwise?"

"I confess that you look the gentleman, but appearances are often deceitful," was the rude retort of the Mexican officer.

"As in your case, Colonel Christo Rublo," came the quick response.

"Knowing me, as you do, for you called me by name, you are aware that I am a gentleman."

"I know that you are so considered; but I wish not to quarrel with you, señor, but to see if you have the nerve to accept my offer."

"Ay, have I, young sir, so produce your gold."

"I am not a carrier cart, señor, to take with me so large a sum; but these will serve as well as gold."

"Pray give me their value, señor," and the youth handed to the dealer four gems, two of them diamonds, one a ruby, and the other an emerald.

"These are worth thirty thousand, señor," said the surprised dealer.

"Señor Colonel, let us make the sum the value of these stones," said the youth.

"Are they genuine?" insolently asked Colonel Rublo.

"I will vouch for them, señor," the dealer said.

"Well, I will take the bet, young sir," and

Colonel Rublo then turned to the dealer, and remarked:

"I put my winnings up, señor, and if I lose to-night over what gold I brought with me, I suppose that my note of hand is good?"

"Certainly, Señor Colonel."

The colonel bowed, and amid a perfect hush the game was begun, the daring young gambler keeping his face in shadow while he played, but evidently not to hide any emotion that he might feel, as his hand was as firm as iron.

Colonel Rublo, on the other hand, was not quite as self-possessed as before, and when the game was won by his boyish-looking opponent, a curse both loud and deep escaped from between his lips.

A murmur of admiration for the youth ran through the crowd as he coolly said:

"Señor Colonel, the game is mine."

"Will you try another for the same amount?"

Colonel Rublo was not a man to quail in the face of a foe, be he a gambler or a soldier, and he said sternly:

"I shall play again."

And again the youth was the winner, while a shout fairly broke forth from the crowd, drowning the bitter imprecation of the colonel, who was almost desperate, as with this loss he saw his entire winnings swept away, along with the sum which he had gotten on the jewels given him by Lady Lulu.

"I shall have to place my jewels in that accursed Jew's hands again to pay the balance due," he muttered, and then remembering the debts in Mexico city which must ere long be paid, and which he had hoped to pay with the money gotten from the Jew, he grew desperate and said almost savagely:

"Do you dare play again, young señor?"

"Oh, yes," was the ready response.

"For the same sum?"

"Make it for any amount you please, Colonel Rublo," was the indifferent reply.

"Let it be for the same sum," growled the officer, his pride being cut at not being able to play for a larger sum, as the youth hinted would be agreeable to him.

"I am content, señor."

And the mysterious young gambler placed his bet, the Mexican officer doing likewise.

At once a hush fell upon all, and in deathlike silence the game was played and lost—by Colonel Rublo!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE "STRANGER" AGAIN APPEARS.

"CARAMBA!"

The word broke fiercely from the shut teeth of Colonel Rublo, as he saw that his young adversary was the winner, and he realized that he had not only lost the money which the Lady Lulu's jewels had brought him, but was thousands of dollars in debt to a mere boy, while his debts in the city of Mexico were further off than ever from being paid.

His brain was in a whirl, his heart beat tumultuously, and he saw ruin staring him in the face.

"Great God! I shall have to fly to El Moro's stronghold and turn pirate, unless I can ward off this trouble," was the thought that surged through his brain.

Maddened by his desperate situation, he naturally turned upon the one who had so humbled his pride and lured him on to the very brink of ruin, and hot and fierce came the words, as he faced the youth:

"No one here seems to know you, señor, and, by the cross! I believe you to be a cheat."

The voices were silenced at once by these insulting words, and all bent their eyes upon the youth.

Not a muscle of his face quivered as he replied:

"Kindly settle your debt first, señor, and then quarrel with me, if so you wish."

A round of *bravas* broke from the bystanders at this, for there were those present who had nothing to fear from the haughty colonel.

As for Cristo Rublo his dark face flushed and then became livid, as he said hoarsely, addressing the dealer:

"Pay that fellow, please, señor, my losses to him, and give me a pen and paper, that I may write you a hand-draft for the amount."

The dealer turned politely to the youth and asked:

"Señor, will you take Government notes, as more easy to carry?"

"Yes, thank you," was the response of the mysterious young gambler, and having had them counted out to him, he placed them in an inner breast pocket of his jacket, and turning to Colonel Rublo said with the utmost coolness:

"You accused me of being a cheat, I believe, señor?"

"I most certainly do, for no honest man could have your pretended luck," was the hoarse reply.

"You shall hear from me again, señor, for I am not one to brook an insult," and the youth was turning away when Colonel Rublo, losing control of himself, cried fiercely:

"You shall bear my mark to keep you from forgetting that threat, for I believe you are cowardly striving to escape from meeting me."

and he raised his hand to strike the youth, when his arm was struck up suddenly, and he received a stinging blow in the face that staggered him, while a deep voice said sternly:

"*Coward would you strike a boy?*"

Colonel Cristo Rublo was frenzied by the blow, and drawing his sword gazed upon the one who had dared to strike him.

He saw before him a tall form, a cloak thrown over the shoulders, and a face he had seen only a few hours before, for it was the mysterious stranger who had disarmed him in the shop of Jacob the Jew.

"Ha! we meet again, do we?" he cried, and brushing aside those who would have checked him, he sprung upon the stranger with uplifted sword.

There was a cry of horror from a score of voices, for all saw that the stranger wore no sword; but, quick as a flash of lightning, he whipped out from his breast a stiletto, and even with its short blade caught the descending steel of his assailant, turning it skillfully, and at the same time seizing the right wrist of the Mexican officer and twisting it backward with irresistible power, he wrenched the hilt from the hand, and snapping the weapon in twain threw the pieces at his feet, while he said calmly:

"Don't force me to kill you, señor, as you deserve to be, for attempting to strike a boy and attacking an unarmed man."

Amid the *bravas* that greeted his act and words, the stranger threw his adversary from him, and glided away through the excited crowd, and, a moment after, when Colonel Rublo, with the calmness of desperation, turned to a friend and demanded that he at once arrange a meeting for him with the man who had thus humbled his pride, he could nowhere be found, and the guard at the door said that a man answering his description, and a youth, elegantly attired, had passed out into the street a moment before.

Calling to several of his acquaintances to follow him, Colonel Rublo dashed out into the street in search of the mysterious stranger and the youth he had befriended; but nowhere could aught be heard of them, and going to his quarters the angry officer called up his Secret Service men and put them at work to hunt down the unknown pair, swearing that he would yet reap vengeance upon them when they should fall into his power.

Having put his bounds of the Secret Service, as he called his spies, upon the trail of the stranger and the young gambler who had so worsted him at cards, Colonel Rublo began to pace his rooms in bitter meditation.

He might capture the mysterious pair and get his revenge; but that would not bring him gold, and gold he must have.

The fact was that the colonel had about wound himself up in his financial affairs.

He had borrowed largely upon all collaterals of a small kind, which he could do without, and besides had a number of debts staring him so boldly in the face that he knew he could not longer put off the day of payment without financial ruin.

Like all gamblers he steadily lost, though at times a winner; but his winnings amounted to about one-third of his expenditures, and with his estate under mortgage, the interest took more than its earnings, while his pay was but pocket-change for him.

As head of the Secret Service, he had managed to keep his affairs a secret, and yet this could not be done much longer, especially with the enormous losses he had that night met with.

He could draw the Government funds, allowed him for the fitting out of the schooners, but having paid for the vessels, the remainder would not aid him very much, and besides that, pay-day must come, and what then?

Such were the thoughts that crowded thick and fast upon him as he walked to and fro in his luxuriously furnished rooms.

He came of the best blood in Mexico; he was proud of his name, and he held a position of great trust and honor, and he knew that so great would be his fall that he would have but one course to pursue, if found out, and that would be to turn pirate.

As a man in his high position, he could marry Lady Lulu, and revel in her wealth; but as a fugitive he knew that her father would never allow her to become his wife.

"No, no! I must do something to ward off this blow, for I am in a desperate situation," he said, hoarsely.

"I owe here and in Mexico City one hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars, for it will take that sum to clear my mortgages, get out my other jewels and collaterals, and pay my debts."

"Then I should have ample to pay the pilot, who must run those two vessels into the clutches of El Moro, and I will need some cash besides."

"With the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand, I will be a happy man, and can run on as I please until I make that beautiful pirate maiden my wife."

"Her booty will last me for years, for I will see to it that her father pays a liberal percentage to me to keep the noose from about his neck."

"But how to get the one hundred and fifty thousand is the question."

"The Jew could let me have it, I know, but not without the best security, and that I have not got, excepting my jewels in that morocco case there, which will bring me but ten thousand."

Thus the colonel, almost frenzied by his desperate situation, continued his monotonous walking to and fro, and his meditation and plotting.

"Ha! I have it! the Jew shall help me!" he cried, suddenly, and his face lighted up with a smile of almost fiendish triumph, while, as though contented with his plot, he threw himself upon his bed and sunk into a peaceful sleep just as the gray of dawn began to steal into his room.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE SWORD'S POINT.

It was after sunset of the day following the scene in the Montezuma Palacio, and Colonel Cristo Rublo sat alone in his rooms.

He had not been out all day, for he felt humiliated by what had occurred in the monte rooms, and he had been too anxious working up a scheme he had in his mind to bring him in the much-needed gold.

His spies, to his great disappointment, had brought in no tidings regarding the mysterious young gambler and his iron handed friend, and they reported that not the slightest trace of them could be found, other than that such a pair had been seen in the street.

From whence they had come, or whither gone, they could not discover, try as they might.

As he could get no other information, Colonel Rublo was compelled to be satisfied with nothing, so sallied out to perfect the plot which had given him so much pleasure when it had suddenly dawned upon him.

In the meantime Jacobs, the Jew, had given Israel a day off, that he might hunt the town over for the mysterious stranger, and at night the young Jew returned with his report that he could only hear of his having appeared in the monte palace and disarmed Colonel Rublo, breaking his sword, and then disappearing in company with a youth who had defeated the Mexican officer at cards, winning an enormous sum from him.

This news Israel had picked up in the town, for it was the talk of the people high and low, and Jacobs, the Jew, seemed really delighted at what he had heard, and said:

"I will remain in the office to-night also, Israel, while you go to the monte Palacio and other retreats, as the stranger may be found thereby."

So Israel after supper departed upon a renewed search for his brave preserver, while Jacobs, the Jew, took his place in the shop, for where the lower class of people dared not come by night, now and then some one, driven by necessity to raise large sums, was wont to seek the Jew's place at night, when curious eyes were not upon them.

Israel had been gone half an hour perhaps, when a face appeared at the iron grating, and a voice said:

"A word with you, please, Señor Jew."

The Jew looked up from his work and saw a sun-bronzed face, with light hair falling upon his shoulders, black eyes, and a blonde beard.

He was dressed in a sailor garb, and had spoken in English.

Jacobs, the Jew, was a fearless man, and he arose and opened the grating, bidding the stranger enter.

He was a stout, seamanlike fellow, with a bluff way about him, and throwing himself into a chair, he said:

"Shipmate, do you buy gems?"

"I do," answered Jew Jacobs, with a slight English accent.

"I have some to sell."

"Let me see them, señor."

"I have not got them with me, for they are too valuable to carry about in these dangerous times, while there is also a lot of other valuables along with them, too bulky to shoulder around for pleasure, and I left them aboard my little craft."

"I judge from your looks, your words regarding your booty, and that it is on board your vessel, that you are a sea rover," calmly said the Jew.

"Yes; I rove the seas."

"And the treasure you have is your share of a piratical booty?"

"I did not say that, señor; but the fact is, I ran across a golden cargo, and I've got it all snug aboard a little smack lying at anchor off-shore, and I'd rather have its value in money, so you can have all at a bargain, though you'll have to carry plenty to get it, as I'm something of a judge of gems and booty, and call it worth considerable over two hundred thousand."

"Ah! so much as that?"

"Every dollar of it, Jew."

"That is a large sum, señor."

"And it's a large amount of value I have in it, Señor Jew."

"Is your smack far from here?"

"At the foot of the next street, señor."

"And you have a crew on board in charge of it?"

"Only a negro sailor, señor, and my wife."

"Ah! Can your negro not bring the booty here?"

"Señor, the law sharks are watching awful close, and as strangers we would be picked up, while you can go where you please."

"As a stranger here how did you know of me?"

"From El Moro," whispered the sailor.

"Ah, yes; well, señor, I will go on board your smack with you, if you will wait a moment, but so watchful are the officers of the law now that I too must go in disguise."

As the Jew spoke he arose, and taking from a shelf near a padre's cowl and cassock he threw them on and was completely disguised.

"It is a common thing, señor, for padres to go on board vessels in the harbor to visit the sick," he said, quietly.

"Yes, señor, but as I do wish to get out of port at once, I hope you will go prepared to buy my booty."

"I pay large sums, señor, in gems, which readily command their value in gold and are easy to carry, while I can give you a few thousands in money, if so you wish."

"I do, señor, as I intend to run into Galveston, sell my smack, and take passage by ship for the United States, for, having enough to keep me from temptation to steal, I shall live an honorable life in the future."

The Jew smiled at this conceit, and drawing to the iron door, he also closed the grating after him, and followed the sailor down the street, walking and appearing like the padre he represented.

Passing out of the deserted street, into one that was thickly populated, they passed along without attracting other attention than a holy father was wont to from those who loved their religion and its representatives, and after a walk of some little distance reached the water's edge.

There was a small boat half-drawn out upon the beach, and pushing this into the water, the sailor bade the Jew enter, following him, and taking the oars.

Off from the other vessels at anchor lay a small smack, some distance from the shore, and toward it the sailor headed.

In silence they went on their way, and running alongside of the smack the sailor bade the Jew step on board, which he did.

"Is your craft deserted?" asked the Jew, in surprise.

"No, señor, there lies my lazy negro asleep forward, as you see, and my wife is in the cabin, and has perhaps turned in for the night," and the sailor made the boat fast astern, and then called out:

"Ho, Black! is that the way you keep guard?"

"Wake up, you lazy fellow, and be on the watch."

The prostrate form forward moved lazily, and then a voice answered:

"All right, sah, I is awake now."

"Enter the cabin, please, señor, and we will soon transact our little business," said the sailor, and Jacobs, the Jew, descended the narrow companionway into the little cuddy which courtesy alone would designate as a cabin.

Turning toward the one who stood forward, having lazily gotten upon his feet, the sailor said something in a low tone, and then followed after the Jew, who, unable to stand without stooping in the little cabin, had seated himself in a low chair at the other end of a small table.

A smoky lamp threw a dim light in the cabin, revealing two bunks to a side, a cupboard, and a curtained-off space forward, and the heat of the place and its miserable surroundings made the Jew anxious to get away, so he said, quickly:

"Señor, let us transact our business at once, for I have no time to lose."

"It can be soon attended to, Jew, for you are my prisoner!" came the threatening words from the sailor's lips.

The Jew sprung to his feet, but striking his head heavily against the low ceiling of the cabin, he sunk back half stunned into his chair, while the sailor advanced upon him with a sword pointing directly at his heart and the threatening words:

"Jew, I led you here to kill and rob you, for I must have your gold!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR DENOUEMENT.

THE blow which Jacobs the Jew had received upon the head, from the low ceiling of the cabin of the little smack, when springing to his feet, had dazed him for a moment; but he was fully aware of his peril, though unable to act in self-defense, for the shock seemed to have temporarily paralyzed him.

He saw that the bold man in whose trap he had fallen, meant just what he said—to kill him.

Ever shrewd, he had yet been cleverly entrapped, and had brought with him a fortune in gems with which to purchase the booty the sailor alleged himself to be the possessor of.

He had also with him some thousands in bank-notes, along with considerable gold.

This was sufficient to make a desperate fight for, but then the man meant more, and that was to have his life and his money too.

As he advanced upon the Jew the sailor showed in his face that he was merciless, and he seemed to gloat over his victim being so wholly in his power, and the vast fortune he would secure with one thrust of his sword.

That thrust he meant to make, for he saw that his victim could not resist him, and the point of his keen weapon was touching the Jew's clothing, when suddenly the intended assassin was seized by the shoulders and hurled into the corner of the cabin with a force that nearly knocked the breath out of him.

The one who thus sent him to the floor then sprung to the side of the Jew, who still sat like one dazed, though his eyes were wide open and he seemed to possess his faculties, only the severe blow upon the head had partially stunned his powers of motion.

"My dear señor, has he wounded you?" cried the one who had come so timely to the rescue, and who was the same stranger who had twice before defeated Colonel Rublo in his intentions, once in the shop of Jacobs the Jew, and again in the Monté Palace.

The sight of the man he had so wished to find, aroused the Jew from his lethargy, and he said, earnestly:

"No, señor, I thank you, he has not harmed me; but I sprung to my feet, forgetting the low ceiling, and the blow stunned me for awhile.

"But I am glad, so glad to meet you again, though you place me under a lasting obligation to you."

"Do not speak of that, señor, for— Ha! the fellow has fled," and the stranger bounded up the companionway, for turning his head he noticed that the sailor, while he had been talking to the Jew, had noiselessly arisen from the corner and slipped out of the cabin.

Upon the deck a man lay prostrate, and bending over him the stranger cried:

"Ha! he has killed my faithful comrade, run him through the heart, and has taken his boat and fled.

"Yes, there he goes shoreward; but let him go, for it is better so.

"Come, señor," and he called down the companionway, and the Jew, still disguised as a padre, ascended to the deck.

"Señor, let me explain one thing to you, and more I cannot say.

"That man meant to kill and rob you, and he chartered this smack for that purpose, and happened to hit upon one of my men to aid him.

"The poor fellow lies there, dead, as you see.

"He informed me of the plot, and I came here to save you, and was fortunate enough to do so.

"Now, I will give this poor fellow the burial of a sailor, that is, drop him into the sea, and then place you on shore, and the officers of the law will be none the wiser for what has happened."

"But do you know this man who so nearly became my assassin, señor?"

"I do, señor."

"Tell me, that I may make him suffer for—"

"No, señor, I cannot disclose his name; but I will pledge you that he will not again attempt your life.

"Still never leave your house at the beck of any man, and you will be safe, and be careful whom you admit by night into your shop.

"Now I will put you ashore," and taking the body of the slain man in his arms, he lowered it noiselessly into the water.

As it sunk from sight the stranger turned to the Jew and said:

"Enter my boat, señor, for I am ready."

The Jew obeyed, and the stranger seized the oars and pulled rapidly shoreward, leaving the smack wholly deserted, at anchor upon the dark waters.

Arriving at the landing, the Jew said, as he sprung ashore:

"You will accompany me, señor?"

"No, I have work to do just now, señor."

"But you will surely tell me who it is that has been my noble friend?"

"No, señor, for I am unknown to you."

"And do you mean that we shall not meet again?" asked Jacobs, the Jew, in surprise.

"We may and we may not, señor."

"Circumstances may cause me to call upon you some day—*adios*, señor," and with a stroke of his oars the stranger sent his light boat flying away from the shore, leaving the Jew standing at the water's edge gazing after him with mingled feelings of pain, regret and annoyance at having been treated so by the man he so longed to know.

As the boat disappeared from view in the darkness, the Jew drew his padre's robe about him and walked slowly homeward, deeply impressed with what had occurred, and pained that he was forced to rest under such deep obligations to a man who was an utter stranger to him, and who appeared to move in an atmosphere of perfect mystery, and always appear at the moment he was most needed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ADINAH, THE JEWESS.

COLONEL RUBLO was again pacing his room

like a caged tiger, his brow black as night, his teeth set firmly.

"By Heaven! to be so foiled is as bitter as a father's curse," he muttered.

"Foiled! and when I felt that I had accomplished all I wished, and ruin staring me in the face.

"Ha! I have another thought, and by the saints! I will carry it out," and hastily throwing on his cloak and drawing his plumed sombrero over his eyes, he left his rooms.

It was growing late, but Colonel Rublo was a man of late hours, and did not care how long he kept others up.

His rapid steps soon brought him to the Haunted Citadel, and he found Israel and the Jew seated in the shop talking earnestly.

Jacobs, the Jew, was telling his clerk of his adventure, for Israel had just returned from his useless search for the stranger, to find that his master had found him, or rather had been found by him.

"Ah, señor, a late call you make.

"Admit Colonel Rublo, Israel," said the Jew, and the iron wicket was swung open, and the Mexican strode haughtily into the office, throwing himself into a chair, and saying brusquely:

"I wish to see you alone, Señor Jacobs."

"Certainly, señor; you may retire, Israel," answered the Jew, and the young man left the shop.

"Now, señor, I am at your service."

"Jacobs, I am here to see you upon a serious matter, that is, to me."

"When men need money, señor, it is generally a serious matter," was the quiet reply.

"I do need money, and considerable of it, too."

"You have a daughter, Jacobs?"

The Jew slightly started, but answered calmly:

"I have, señor."

"She is of a marriageable age, I believe."

"She is just eighteen, señor."

"Beautiful, I have heard."

"She is so considered."

"You have said, so I have heard, if you could marry her off to a man holding high rank in the Mexican army, you would give her a large fortune as a dower."

"Señor, I wish my daughter to marry well, and, as there is not one of my own race in this land whom I would care to bestow her upon, I have said, as you have heard, did she marry a man of distinction in Mexico, I would give to her half a million dollars as a dower."

"So I have heard, Jew, and I have come to ask her hand in marriage," was the bold remark of the colonel.

"Would you marry a Jewess, señor?"

"I have heard that her mother was a Christian."

"True, señor; her mother was an American lady, who saved my life, and loving her, I sought to win her affection and did so.

"But I am a Jew, and my child is a Jewess, for her religion is that of our race."

"I care not what her religion is, so that she has gold, and I am willing to make her my wife, if you are willing to keep your compact, which was, so I have heard, to give to her husband a couple of thousand dollars as a pledge of your good faith, and pay the balance upon her wedding-day."

"There is one thing to be taken into consideration, señor."

"Well?"

"I do not intend to sell my daughter."

"How do you mean?"

"You have heard what I was willing to do, and being in hard luck just now, you desire to build up your fortune by marrying my daughter."

"Am I not right?"

"I need not dissemble, señor, you are," was the frank confession of the Mexican.

"But, señor, I meant not to sacrifice my child, for she must have a voice in the matter."

"Well?"

"She shall marry no man she does not love."

"Ah!"

"Should she love you, señor, she can do as she pleases in the matter."

"How am I to win her love if I do not see her?" impatiently said the officer.

"You shall see her, señor."

"Ah!"

And the Jew pulled a bell-cord.

In a moment a servant in livery appeared in the rear doorway, saying politely:

"Your commands, señor?"

"Say to the Señorita Adinah that I will bring a guest with me to supper."

The servant disappeared, while the Mexican sneered:

"You live in style, Jew, to keep liveried servants!"

"I have the fortune to support my living, Colonel Rublo, which is more than you can say," was the calm response, and it stung the Mexican to the quick.

A moment after Jew Jacobs arose and bade the Mexican follow him.

They passed through the door at the rear of the shop, and found themselves in a corridor lighted by a swinging lamp.

A short walk brought them to a pair of stone steps, ascending which they passed along another corridor, and the Jew knocked at a door at the further end.

A voice from within bade them enter, and obeying, the Mexican was completely dazzled by the scene that burst upon his astonished vision.

The room was large, exquisitely furnished with divans, ottomans and chairs that incited to repose, while a superb lamp cast a mellow halo upon the scene.

The carpet was like velvet beneath the feet, windows draped with silk curtains looked out upon the garden, which was illuminated in some mysterious way, and a fountain playing high in air, seemed to cast up silver and gold spray, as it reflected the lights cast upon it.

Seated by the table, a book in hand, was the one who had bade them enter.

It was a maiden as lovely as an artist's dream of a model, with large, deer-like, earnest eyes, the lashes long and thick, and a mouth that seemed like a crimson rose hiding pearls within its petals, for the teeth were white, small and even.

She possessed an olive-tinted skin, rich with the bloom of health, and hair that was in strange contrast with her black eyes, for it was golden, and wound in massive braids about her haughty head and held there with ruby pins and a cowl of diamonds, representing a star and with both sides alike.

She was dressed in a robe of some soft, silken texture that clung to her exquisite form in graceful folds.

Having gazed in rapture at her beauty of face and form the Mexican saw with equal delight that she wore jewels that were worth a fortune, and he bent low at the introduction of the Jew, who said:

"Adinah, my child, this gentleman is Colonel Christo Rublo, a distinguished officer of the Mexican service, and he has done us the honor of becoming our guest for the evening."

The Mexican flushed, for he detected the sneer in the Jew's tones; but Adinah came forward and offered her hand and said in the sweetest of voices:

"I am glad to meet Colonel Rublo, and he is welcome to our home."

Christo Rublo was more than charmed, and when they were ushered, by the same liveried servant, into the upper rooms, and served with the rarest delicacies and wines, in silver plates and golden goblets, he was fairly enchanted, and muttered to himself:

"She is, if possible, more beautiful than Lady Lulu the Lioness, and her father is doubtless as rich as is El Moro the Pirate; but I shall not desert the Lioness, oh, no! and I will not give the Jewess up either."

"At last, Christo Rublo, you are in luck, and your fortune will be equal to your expenditures."

Such were the thoughts of the wicked man, and under their influence, and the Jew's rare old wine, he made himself the charming companion that he could be, and quite surprised Jacobs, while Adinah certainly seemed most pleased with him.

Rising to take his departure, and anxious to have the affair settled at once, he took the maiden's hand and said:

"Fair Adinah, your good father has given me the right to ask of you your hand in marriage, and I need not say to you that one glance into your dark eyes has wholly enthralled my heart and soul, and I beg that you accept me, not only as your suitor, but as your accepted lover."

"Señor," and Adinah spoke softly but firmly, "señor, my father has also given me the right of giving my hand where my heart goes."

"And can I not have your heart, too, fair girl?"

"No, señor."

"But I can win your love."

"No, señor, I could only love one whom I knew to be the soul of honor, and—"

"Do you accuse me of being otherwise?" somewhat hotly said the Mexican, whose pride was touched, for he had never had his love cast aside before.

"I accuse you of no wrong, señor; but I could never love one whose eyes are untrue, and yours are."

"If I wrong you, you are strangely unfortunate to wear a look that your life belies."

"Señorita, you are insulting," fiercely said the Mexican, stung to the quick by her words.

"I meant not to be, señor; but you asked me for my hand, my love, and I show you how impossible it is to gain the one without winning the other, and you could not do either."

"Señor Rublo, *adios*."

The Mexican wheeled upon his heel and turned to the Jew, who stood idly gazing out of the window upon the playing fountain in the garden.

"Jew, did you bring me here to be insulted by one against whom I am powerless to act?"

"No, señor; you asked to marry my daughter, and I gave you the chance to see her, and upon your own head rests the result."

"As the Señorita Adinah has refused your suit and dismissed you, please follow me."

A curse broke from the lips of the Mexican, and then in silence he followed the Jew, and was soon let out of the rambling old building by a door in the wall, and not through the shop, which was closed up for the night.

"Good-night, señor."

"Oh, we shall meet again, Jew, for your gold has proven my salvation before this, and shall again, and I will have need of your aid," said the Mexican.

Jacobs, the Jew, bowed, and the colonel walked rapidly away, returning to his quarters, where he impatiently paced the floor until the dawn came, and utterly worn out he threw himself upon his bed to snatch much-needed rest for mind and body after all that he had passed through the past few days and nights.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

COLONEL RUBLO awoke about noon refreshed, but yet in ill-humor, for he felt that he was that much nearer to the end he dreaded so much.

He arose and made his toilet with the aid of his peon valet, and then sat down to his breakfast, but with little appetite to eat anything.

He seemed fretful and ill at ease, and when Ponce, the valet, came in and told him that a señor wished to see him, he asked abruptly:

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, señor."

"One of the officers of the schooner?"

"No, señor."

"I will see him in my sitting-room when I have finished my breakfast."

And Colonel Rublo nibbled away at his food as though determined to make the visitor await his pleasure.

At length he arose and entered the sitting-room, to behold a tall form standing by the window gazing out into the street.

Turning as he heard the step behind him, the visitor said politely:

"Colonel Rublo, I believe?"

The Mexican officer was a man not easily thrown off his guard, and he had his nerves under control at all times; but for once he was startled, and could not disguise it.

"Caramba! you here?" he cried, in a hoarse voice, at the same time placing his hand upon the hilt of a sword that lay upon the table in the center of the room.

"Yes, señor; I am here to see you," was the quiet answer of the visitor, and seeing the hostile act of the colonel, he continued:

"Nay, take your hand off that sword, for you have already felt that I was your master, and it would be useless for you to try conclusions with me now, especially as I came not here to harm you."

"Why are you here?" gruffly asked the colonel.

"That, señor, you shall soon know, if you will be seated and allow me a short conversation with you," was the quiet response.

"Who are you?"

"That matters not, señor."

"You are a stranger to me."

"In name, yes, Colonel Rublo; and yet we have met on three occasions before."

"We have met twice, señor, and I am not the man to forget either meeting," said the colonel, sharply.

"Permit me to refresh your memory, Señor Colonel."

"We met in the shop of Jacobs, the Jew, when you attempted to assassinate his clerk—"

"Ha! dare you address such words to me?"

And the officer seized the sword at hand.

Without heeding the words or act, the stranger continued:

"We met again, señor, at the Monté Palacio, when you attacked a youth and—"

"Those are the only times that we have met, sir."

"You are mistaken, Colonel Rublo, for we met last night."

"Last night?"

And the Mexican's face paled.

"Yes, señor; when you, in the disguise of an English sailor, sought to—"

"You are mistaken, sir—"

"I am not mistaken, Señor Colonel, for I knew you in spite of your disguise, and am aware that you killed the poor fellow who barred your way when you escaped from the smack's cabin."

"The Jew did not know you, señor, but I did, and I alone hold your secret."

"And you shall die," shouted the enraged Mexican, as he withdrew his hand from his bosom and fired full at the strange visitor.

The act was so sudden that the stranger was taken by surprise, evidently not expecting the colonel to fire there in his room; but the bullet sped by harmlessly, though it grazed the cheek of the one at whom it was aimed, and the next instant the door opened and the lancero orderly and the peon valet entered in alarm.

"Señor colonel, your accidental shot alarmed your attendants for your safety," calmly said the stranger, with a look at the Mexican which had in it a dare for him to say to the contrary.

As though under the influence of his remarkable visitor, Colonel Rublo said, sullenly:

"It was nothing, Ponce, except that my pistol went off by accident."

The lancero and valet retired, and the stranger continued in his same quiet way:

"I did not think you such a fool, Colonel Rublo, as to fire upon a man without being sure you could kill him."

"But you did well to dismiss those men, for I have it in my power to make trouble for you, or to serve you well."

"Ha! you have come here to make me give you gold to keep my secret?"

"You mean the secret of your trying to kill and rob the Jew?"

"Do you dare accuse me of such an act?"

"I dare, and do accuse you; but come, Colonel Rublo, do not waste your breath in trying to quarrel with me, for I can serve you."

"For gold?" sneered the Mexican.

"On the contrary, I am here to give you gold, or its equivalent."

"In the Saints' name, what do you mean?"

"Sit down and I will tell you."

Colonel Rublo sunk into a chair, all interest now that the magic name of gold was mentioned, and in his favor.

The stranger coolly drew a chair up to the table and said:

"Colonel Rublo, the world deems you a rich man, whereas you have mortgaged your estates, owe a number of pressing debts in the City of Mexico, and you have involved yourself here heavily at the Monté Palace, besides disposing of certain gems that came into your possession not long since, and the receipts of which were used for another purpose."

"In Satan's name! who are you?" almost gasped the Mexican officer, his face now livid.

"I am one, señor, who has an eye on you, and will continue to have for some time yet."

"Now name me the sum you need to pay off your mortgages and your debts; the amount due the Monté Palace I am aware of."

"Why should I name my debts to you?" haughtily said the Mexican.

"You need not if you so wish; but I cannot aid you unless I know."

"Ah! then suppose I say that it will take one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to square me with all my creditors?" said the officer, with a sneer.

"Will that sum do it?" was the cool remark.

"Yes."

"Wholly so?"

"I say yes," was the impatient reply.

"With one hundred and fifty thousand dollars you can pay off your mortgages, liquidate your debts in Mexico City and cancel your note to the keeper of the Montezuma Palace?"

"I can."

"If I give you the equivalent of that sum, will you so use it?"

Colonel Rublo sprung to his feet excitedly, while he cried:

"I demand to know who you are, and why you take this interest in me?"

"Neither of those questions will I answer, señor; but if you will give me your written pledge that you will not devote one peso of the money to gambling, and will promptly pay your dues at the Monté Palace, and go to Mexico City, as soon as you can leave here, for I know that you are on special duty in Vera Cruz, I will now place in your hands gems that will realize the sum named."

"Do you mean this?" hoarsely asked the Mexican.

"I do, if you will give such a pledge as I demand."

"I will gladly give it," excitedly said the colonel.

"Give me pen, ink and paper."

They were placed before him, and in a bold hand the stranger wrote as follows:

"VERA CRUZ, Dec. 5th, 18—."

"I, Christo Rublo, Colonel of Lanceros and chief of the secret service of Mexico, do hereby pledge myself, on my honor, and hope of my soul's salvation, to liquidate every dollar I owe within the next fifteen days, *Deo volente*, with the proceeds of precious stones now placed in my hands, and given me for that purpose, and the market value of which is one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Now read and sign that," calmly said the mysterious visitor.

Colonel Rublo took the pen, and his hand trembled, but after having nerved himself by an effort, he affixed his signature and full rank, afterward placing his seal thereto, as the stranger demanded.

Taking from his pocket a leathern case, the mysterious man thereupon poured upon the table a pile of beautiful, sparkling gems.

These he carefully assorted over, counting the value of each and setting it down, until the amount desired was reached.

"You are a judge of gems, señor?" he asked.

"Somewhat."

"You are convinced that these are genuine and fully worth the sum you require?"

"I feel so."

And the Mexican gazed upon them with hungry eyes.

"Then, señor, do as you have pledged yourself, or you will get into serious trouble. Adios."

And the stranger bowed and left the room.

"Ho, Ponce! follow that man and find out all

you can about him," cried the Mexican, summoning his valet the moment the stranger's back was turned.

Ponce disappeared, while the colonel devoted himself to counting over his gems, gloating on them the while with delight.

In half an hour Ponce returned nursing a wound in his face, and said ruefully:

"I followed him, master, and knew not that he saw me, when he turned, knocked me down, and bade me tell my master not to put spies upon his track."

"You see where his blow struck, Señor Master, and he has an iron hand."

"I know that he has," significantly said the colonel, and then he added, speaking to himself:

"I would give much to solve the mystery attending that man, and some day I will; but now to rejoice over my good fortune, for to-night the Jew shall give me the gold I need for my dues here, and the balance of the gems I will carry to Mexico city and pay off what I owe, and then my credit is good for any amount until I marry Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon."

"Ha! ha! ha! in spite of the mystery hanging over my good fortune, I rejoice at my luck—Well, Ponce, what is it?" and the Mexican turned to his peon valet, who just then entered and answered:

"A señor, to visit you, master."

"Caramba! who is he?"

"I know not, Señor Master; but he is one along in years."

"Another stranger? Well, one strange visitor has turned out so well, at least to all appearances, that I cannot refuse to see another."

"Show him in, Ponce," and the colonel quickly armed himself with a pair of pistols, and stood just where he could grasp his sword in an instant, should the visitor prove to be an enemy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COLONEL'S VISITOR.

WHEN Ponce, the peon, threw open the door of Colonel Rublo's sitting-room there entered a man who might well have sat for the portrait of the Wandering Jew, for he looked the counterpart of the engravings one sees of that strange character of fiction.

He had a light cloak thrown over his broad shoulders, and walked with the step of one who counted his years beyond three-score.

The eyes, however, were bright and piercing, and there was a look of resolution about him that showed age had not wholly deadened his senses.

"You would see me, señor?"

"Be seated, pray," and Colonel Rublo motioned his aged visitor to a seat.

The old man sunk down as though weary, and in a voice that was cracked by age, answered:

"Are you the Señor Rublo, of the Secret Service?"

"I am, señor; how can I serve you?"

"Are there hearers to what I may say?"

"None whatever other than myself."

"It will be worse for you, señor, than myself, should you have any of your hirelings within ear-shot."

Colonel Rublo slightly started at the words of the old man, but feeling that he had nothing to fear from one so aged, answered:

"I have told you that we are alone, so tell me who you are and why you have come here to see me?"

"Señor, I have come to have a talk with you about the pirates."

"What pirates?"

"The Lagoon outlaws."

"Ah! what of them?"

"You are fitting out an expedition against them."

"Who said so?"

"Never mind where I got my information, señor; but I know it to be a fact that you are fitting out two fine schooners to go and attack the stronghold of El Moro."

"I am fitting out two vessels, yes, that is not to be denied, old man; but their destination is not known to a man in Vera Cruz besides myself."

"Well, señor, I came to offer my services as pilot, if you meant to send the schooner against El Moro."

"You know the coast then?"

"Perfectly."

"And the stronghold of El Moro, the Corsair Commodore?"

"As I know my wrinkled old face, señor."

"Who are you?"

The old man arose, and after glancing about the room, said in a whisper:

"I am El Moro, the Corsair Commodore."

"Ha! now I recognize your eyes; but what brought you here, El Moro?"

"Partly to see you, Señor Colonel, and also to look up my daughter."

"What! has your daughter disappeared?" asked Colonel Rublo, anxiously.

"She left the stronghold, señor, to run down to Vera Cruz here, on business; but she overstayed her time, and I grew anxious about her, so came to find her."

"And have you succeeded?"

"No, señor, for her *goleta* is not in the harbor and must have set sail again."

"This is strange, and I wish I had known that she was here; but may her craft not be disguised in some way?"

"It might be, señor, it is true, but what motive had she in disguising the *goleta*, as it is not known?"

"Well, I can put my spies to work and find her if she is here."

"I felt that you could do so, and I would feel obliged if you would."

Colonel Rublo touched the bell-rope, and Ponce appeared.

"Describe the *goleta*, señor."

El Moro did so, speaking in the assumed voice of an old man.

Writing a few lines, Colonel Rublo said:

"Ponce, take this to Captain Pablo's quarters."

The peon disappeared, and then the Mexican turned to the disguised pirate chief and said:

"Señor, I am glad to welcome you back from your long cruise, and I hope that in the future we may be friends, as in the past."

"It depends upon you, Colonel Rublo, for you have it in your power to break up my stronghold on the coast, did you so wish; but by not doing so, I pledge you my word you shall not regret it, for circumstances are now transpiring to make me much stronger in vessels and men, and your recompense for keeping off the Government bounds shall be most generous."

"I will do as I have done in the past for you, El Moro; but I hope ere long that your daughter may become my wife, as you know that I am anxious to make her such."

"You are sure you are willing to wed the daughter of a pirate, Colonel Rublo?"

"I certainly am, for the Lady Lulu is beautiful, accomplished, and going to the capital with me as the daughter of a ranchero, I shall be most proud of her."

"And then you know that her dower will equal that of a princess," said El Moro, with something like sarcasm in his voice.

"Oh yes, I do not despise gold, chief, and you must not be niggardly in your offerings; but let me prove my faithfulness to you by saying that the two schooners now being fitted out are for you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and I am sparing no Government gold to make them the best of vessels, and to fit them out most thoroughly."

"But how am I to get them, señor?"

"My plan is to put an officer and a working crew on board, as soon as they are ready to sail, to run them out of the port."

"This will throw the people here off their guard, as to their destination, for I am having the officers and crew rendezvous at a point on the coast, where the schooners are to go to meet them."

"But, under a pilot who was to be in my pay, the two vessels were to put into your harbor, by mistake, as it were, and you were to be notified and could readily board and capture them."

"In this way I should have done my duty for the Government, and the officer on board will get the credit of having sold you the schooners."

"A splendid idea, señor, and they will make a fine acquisition to my fleet; but have you engaged your pilot?"

"No, but he is to be engaged by a party here."

"I had a plan to offer as pilot and thus run the schooners into a trap, where my fleet could pounce down upon and capture them; but your plan is the better one, yet I still might serve as the pilot."

"You might indeed, and I will send you to apply for the berth."

"To whom shall I go?"

"To Jacobs the Jew."

"Ah, yes, I know of him."

"Tell him you wish to pilot the schooners down the coast, and make your terms with him to suit yourself."

"Now, where can I find you if I need you?"

"I started here in my brig, señor, but she lies off the port some leagues, while I captured a lugger out of Galveston to run in with, and am anchored just off this street, so you cannot miss me."

"I'll send word aboard as soon as I get news of your daughter, and I hope we will find that she has not left port."

"I hope so, señor, or if so, that no harm has befallen her; but now I will go to offer my services to Jacobs the Jew as a pilot," and, after a few minutes' longer conversation, El Moro left the quarters of the Mexican officer, who muttered:

"If Lulu the Lioness is in this port, she shall not leave it until she is my wife, for I am afraid she may yet give me the slip."

"But, in the Saints' name, what brought her here?"

"I must be careful, for that girl is as cunning as a fox and as dangerous as a tigress, and her coming here means some plot against me, I fear."

As he spoke the last word Ponce reappeared in the room with the remark:

"Señor Master, a lady to see you."

"Ah! who can it be? Ask her to enter, Ponce," and in swept a lady, a veil completely hiding her face from the curious gaze of Colonel Rublo.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VAILED LADY.

COLONEL RUBLO was ever polite to the fair sex; he wished to hold their influence, and, as long as he did not marry, he, of course, held the good regard of all, and won favor by his courtly manner, good looks, gallantry and rank.

Seeing that the one who entered his room, though veiled, had the appearance of a lady, he bowed low and placed a chair for her, while he said in his pleasant way when addressing a pretty woman:

"Your servant, señorita."

"Colonel Rublo, you did not expect a visit from me," was the low answer.

And the veil being raised, the beautiful face of Lady Lulu, the Lioness, was revealed.

Colonel Rublo started visibly, his face flushing and paling by turns.

He had his spies at work that very moment trying to find Lady Lulu, and she walks boldly into his very quarters.

What could her visit mean?

The colonel was a trifle nervous as he exclaimed:

"Lady Lulu! this is indeed an honor."

"It is a necessity, señor," was the reply.

"You have but to say how I can serve you, señorita, and it is done," was the polite reply.

"Colonel Rublo, business of a nature that I need not explain, brought me to Vera Cruz, and relying upon you for the carrying out of the plans you formed to deliver into my father's hands the two vessels, I did not worry you with a call, and was intending to return home, when one of my crew was seized and thrown into prison by your men."

"Of what was he guilty, señorita?"

"They mistook him, doubtless, for some one else, and two of them attacked him, but these he beat off, when others came to the rescue of your men, and he was captured, put in irons and placed in prison, as I have said."

"This is strange, Lady Lulu, for my men are not liable to make mistakes of such a serious nature, and they may have recognized in your seaman an old offender against the laws of our land."

"They did nothing of the kind, señor, for he has never been an offender against the Mexican laws, having only lately landed here, and accompanying me here to serve me alone, so I ask of you, señor, an order for his release, and I will be most thankful."

"You shall have it, señorita; or, rather, I will send my peon servant to the prison to fetch the man, while you await him here."

"No, I will go myself and have him released, for I have work for him to do, as I desire to sail to-night."

"So soon, Lady Lulu?" regretfully asked the officer.

"Yes, señor, for I have accomplished the work that brought me here: but have you any word to send my father regarding the sailing of the schooners?"

"Not now, Lady Lulu; but he shall hear from me within the week, for they will sail by that time."

"Do you need any more money, señor, to help in successfully carrying out your plan?"

"I have about expended the sum I realized from the gems, Lady Lulu, large as it was; but the truth is, where there is such secrecy demanded, it requires enormous payments to buy silence."

"True, señor, and there is a heavy demand upon your resources all the time, rich as you are, so please take these few gems to expend in behalf of the interest of my father and myself," and the maiden handed the Mexican a small buckskin roll that contained gems.

"At what sum may I appraise them, Lady Lulu?" asked the gold-hungry man, slightly flushing as he thought he detected sarcasm in the tones of his generous visitor.

"They will bring fully twenty thousand dollars, señor."

"Ah! so much? You are most liberal, Lady Lulu; but every dollar shall be expended in your interests, and the day that you become my bride I will settle upon you my entire estates."

"Señor Rublo, a pirate's daughter should bring a dower that will be sufficient for a king's living, especially the daughter of El Moro, the Corsair Commodore."

"And when am I to have the honor of claiming my sweet Lulu?"

"I have not yet set the day, señor."

"I sincerely hope that your affections are not interested elsewhere," said Colonel Rublo, with a sudden pang of jealousy.

"Can the gallant Colonel Rublo believe it possible that any man could be a rival to him? And more, when it is El Moro's wish that his daughter should marry the chief of the Mexican Secret Service League, could a mere girl's whim cast aside the will of two such powerful men as the Corsair Commodore and Colonel Rublo?"

The Mexican winced, he knew not why, for he was not sure whether Lady Lulu was making fun of him or not; but he answered:

"It should be proof to the Lady Lulu that she is idolized by me, when I, a Mexican colonel and chief of the Secret Service League, can ally myself to a pirate king, and protect him secretly, though openly appearing to hunt him down."

"Yes, it is either a proof of your love for the pirate's daughter, or—"

"Or what, señorita?" asked Colonel Rublo, as the maiden paused.

"Or the pirate's gold," was the calm response.

"Señorita El Moro!" cried the colonel, indignantly.

"Do not be angry, señor, for the truth only offends, it is said, and I only remarked that it was one or the other, and you know best which it is; but I must depart, and, if you have to use more gold, let me know, señor, and it will be refunded to you, for we pirates must live, if we have to share our booty with the Mexican Government itself."

Colonel Rublo looked really distressed, and to hide his feelings he bent over the table and wrote hastily an order for the imprisoned seaman, and, sealing it, he handed it to Lady Lulu with the remark:

"This will get your sailor free, señorita, and if I can otherwise serve you, command me."

"You are very kind, señor; *adios*," and drawing her veil closely over her beautiful face once more, Lady Lulu took her departure.

"Ponce!"

"Señor Master," and the peon appeared as the maiden departed.

"Put a spy upon that lady's track, to report fully and promptly to me."

"Yes, señor," and Ponce departed, to soon after return with the report:

"Gringo the Spy is on the lady's track, señor."

"He is a good man."

"The same old señor is outside, and begs to see you, master."

"Ah! tell him I will see him," and as Ponce departed the colonel added:

"Old El Moro just missed his daughter."

"Now to bleed the old rascal, for while I am in luck I may as well get all that I can."

A moment after, El Moro, the Corsair Commodore, entered, wearing the same disguise as upon his former visit.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BY HIS OWN HAND.

"WELL, señor, back again?" said Colonel Rublo, as El Moro entered.

"I failed to see the Jew, colonel, so returned to learn if aught had been brought in by your spies of whether the Lady Lulu was in town, or had sailed?"

"Nothing so far, El Moro; but I have thought, señor, should she be here, that it would be as well to have her wed me now as at any other time."

"Then, when I return to Mexico city, she can accompany me, and no one will know from where I got my beautiful bride."

"True, señor; and I will urge it, should she be found not to have sailed."

"But can her consent be obtained to so hasty a marriage?"

"Yes, señor; she will do as I say; but, should she desire a little time, and to first return to the stronghold for a few days, I can arrange to have her run back here in some vessel I will capture, and coming with her, I can claim to be a Cuban, and thus all suspicion against you, should there be any, will be allayed."

"True; but I would rather marry her now, and can tell the same story, for that matter."

"It shall be as you wish, señor, and I can still run out as pilot of the schooner, and my men with me, eight in number, can enlist on the two crafts, so that we will be equal to an emergency, should any occur."

"Certainly; and I will have the shipping-officer take them, if they will drop in on him one by one to-day and to-morrow."

"Thank you, señor; so I will dispose of the lugger and let them take up their quarters in town, as I will do, mine being at the San Juan tavern, where you can find me, should you need me."

"I will communicate with you, El Moro, the first news I get; but, by the way, I came off from Mexico city without preparing for certain pecuniary contingencies and need a little money for my personal use, that which I had having been devoted to getting the schooners in perfect shape for you, so if you could—"

"Señor Colonel, I was about to ask you if you were not drawing, for my sake, rather heavily upon your private funds, and offer you a supply of gold, while, after you have made Lulu your wife, for all that you do in my behalf, protecting my interests, and posting me on secret moves and the sailing of certain richly-laden vessels, I intend to give you one-third interest in my prizes."

"You are most generous, my dear Commodore El Moro; but what I do for you is from the devoted love I feel for your beautiful daughter—Ah! do you mean that I shall accept this purse of gold?"

And the colonel grasped a heavy purse the corsair extended.

"Señor, there is gold in the large end, and

gems in the smaller; in all, some fifteen thousand dollars."

"I thank you indeed, and I will return the loan when I reach Mexico city."

"No, indeed, señor, for I feel that you have paid out far more than that sum, and this is but a little cash in hand for the present."

"While I think of it, let me say that you need not again go to the Jew in regard to acting as pilot, for I merely wished him to secure a man, not wishing to be known in the matter myself; but as you will serve in that capacity, it will save the gold which I gave Jacobs to pay a man to run the schooners into your clutches."

"Ah! you paid him then for a man?"

"Yes, the small sum of five thousand only."

"I must return it to you," and El Moro's hand dove down into an inner pocket, and though Colonel Rublo said:

"No! no! I beg you no!" he handed the crisp notes over to the amount of five thousand, and a moment after took his departure.

"Ha! ha! ha!" and Colonel Rublo laid back in his luxurious chair and laughed.

"Ha! ha! ha! I am indeed in luck, for I have gotten a small fortune out of the daughter and another from El Moro."

"This, added to the princely sum given me by that mysterious stranger, enables me to feel rich indeed."

"But somehow I feel as though the money that stranger gave me will have to be paid back with usurious interest far greater than that the old Jew charged me; but I'll not worry about that until the time comes, and, if I could lay hands on that mysterious man his life would not be worth a single peso."

"Ay, and catch and kill him I will, and that will pay his debt."

"Egad! he may be a pirate himself, laying me under obligations so that I cannot hang him if caught."

"But where I'd spare El Moro, he must hang, for I fear that man as I never feared man before, and he shall be executed without trial, as soon as I can get him into my clutches."

"Now to visit old Jacobs," and half an hour after Colonel Rublo entered the Jew's shop.

Israel said that his master had just come in, but he would ask if he would see the colonel.

This he did, and Jacobs, the Jew, entered his office a moment after.

"Señor Jew, I have come to say that you need not interest yourself in securing a pilot, as I asked you to do."

"I have just been to see a man, señor, and find I can secure his services if needed."

"He will not be needed."

"As you please, Colonel Rublo, there is no harm done," coldly said the Jew.

"Now, Jew, I have business with you, for I wish you to give me value on these gems, and in good drafts on Mexico city, excepting an amount I will need in gold for use here."

"You have here a rich collection, Colonel Rublo, just such as a pirate might bring in," calmly said the Jew.

"Yes, they are rare gems, and I have been years collecting them, for I have invested my money that way generally," was the answer, and Colonel Rublo eyed the Jew as he assorted the different stones and trinkets, for a few of them were set as brooches, earrings and in miniature cases.

Having estimated their value, which was even above that which both the Corsair Commodore and his daughter had placed on them, the Jew gave drafts for the amount on Mexico city, and handed them to the delighted officer, who hastily took his departure, armed with a larger ready fortune than he had ever possessed before.

From the Jew's shop Colonel Rublo went to the harbor where the schooners were being fitted out which he treacherously intended to place in the hands of El Moro, to add to his already powerful pirate fleet.

They were both beautiful vessels, but one of them was a trifle larger than the other, and carried a vast spread of canvas for her to manage, while her model indicated seaworthiness and speed.

From keel to topmast they were being put into perfect trim, and their armament was all that could be desired, the larger one carrying two pivot guns, one forward, the other aft, that would have well become the deck of a line-of-battle ship.

In fact, the treacherous Government officer intended to do nothing by halves, and took far more pains in fitting the schooners out for El Moro than he would have done had he intended them for the legitimate service which it was believed they were to start on.

In Vera Cruz no whisper had gotten out as to their destination, though some surmised that it would be to hunt pirates, others that they were to be Government cruisers for foreign voyages, and still more that they were armed by private individuals to be dispatched as privateers to prey upon the commerce of the enemies of Mexico.

The absence of large crews in the port for them aided the mystery, as Colonel Rublo was determined this circumstance should; but, that he might appear to be acting in perfect faith, he had already sent picked officers and men to wait

at a certain rendezvous upon the coast, where he told them the schooners would put in for them after sailing from Vera Cruz.

This secrecy, it was said by the officials in the secret of what the Government intended the schooners for, was necessary on account of the numerous spies the pirates kept in port, and who would report the coming of an expedition to El Moro, did they suspect that there was to be one against him.

So stood matters at the time of Colonel Rublo's visit to the two vessels being so thoroughly fitted out.

A run over the pretty schooners, and a chat with the officers in charge, convinced Colonel Rublo that they would be ready for use within the week, and having set a night for their departure, and ordered those in charge to ship any good men who came and offered themselves, the Mexican returned to his quarters, content with himself, and in good humor with the world in general.

As he reached home, Gringo, his spy, met him.

"Well, Gringo, what of the lady?" he asked as the man followed him into his brightly-lighted room, for night had fallen.

"Señor, I did as Ponce bade me, followed the lady to the jail, where she secured the release of the señor who was a prisoner there."

"The señor?"

"Yes, Señor Colonel."

"Was he not a peer?"

"Oh no, señor."

"Nor a common seaman?"

"Oh no, señor, he was the señor whom I saw enter your rooms, and the same as I saw disarm you with his knife only, in the Monté Palacio, for I was there as a spy, and in disguise, that night."

Colonel Rublo was upon his feet now in a blazing rage, his eyes burning, his face livid, as he cried:

"Do you mean to say that the man whom I gave an order to be released from prison was the mysterious stranger whom I have so longed to capture?"

"He was the one I have said, señor," answered Gringo, intensely surprised at the excitement of his chief, for he knew not that that same mysterious man had kept his master from killing the young Jew, Israel, had saved Jacobs, the Jew, from death and robbery upon the little smack, had given to him a fortune in gems, in addition to his protection to the youthful gambler in the Monté Palace, and was then discovered to be the friend of Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon.

Gringo the Spy did not know all this, and so wondered at his chief's almost ungovernable excitement, and fairly shrunk from his blazing eyes and trumpet voice as he cried:

"And what then?"

"How mean you, Señor Colonel?" cried Gringo.

"And which way went this lady and the prisoner she so cleverly released from jail, for my men doubtless captured him and put him there by my orders?"

"They did, señor, and his capture was reported in writing to you, and I brought it; see, there it lies on your table, unopened," and Gringo pointed to a sealed envelope which had before escaped Colonel Rublo's eyes.

Seizing it, he read aloud:

"SEÑOR:—

"I have to report the capture of the mysterious man whom you ordered taken dead or alive, and that he is now in the city calabozo in double irons."

"Caramba! this is signed by my captain of spies, and I failed to notice it."

"Caramba! Caramba! But what then, Gringo?"

"You ask, señor, of the lady?"

"Yes, and the prisoner?"

"They have left port, señor."

"What?"

"I tracked them to a small coasting-craft, señor, which set sail at once."

"Why in the Saints' name did you not report this to me?"

"I have been here, señor, these two hours past to tell you."

"By Heaven! that craft shall be overhauled."

"Come with me, Gringo, and I will dispatch the fleetest craft in port in pursuit, and the fugitives shall be run down," almost shouted Colonel Rublo, and an hour after a small armed cutter was in chase of the little vessel.

Seeing her depart under full sail, Colonel Rublo returned to his quarters to find there awaiting him none other than the mysterious stranger himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN DURANCE VILE.

HAD his satanic majesty been awaiting Colonel Christo Rublo in his rooms upon his return from having dispatched a vessel in chase of the little craft which Lady Lulu and the released prisoner had set sail in, he could not have caused the Mexican officer more intense surprise than did the appearance of the mysterious stranger.

After the first shock of amazement was over,

Colonel Rublo felt a flash of grim triumph in having in his power the man of men he wished to get his grip on.

He had called at the colonel's quarters, and Ponce, the peon, knowing how the colonel wished to see him, had asked him in to await his master's return.

When the colonel arrived, Ponce did not happen to be at the door, and so the lancero on duty merely stated that there was a gentleman awaiting within.

Expecting to see a brother officer, or some citizen of the town, Christo Rublo had been wholly taken aback when his eyes fell upon a man whom he then believed to be at sea, flying along toward the lagoon stronghold in company with the Lady Lulu.

The stranger arose at his entrance and bowed politely, while the colonel said with grim joy in his tones:

"Well, sir, we meet again."

"We do, Colonel Rublo, and I feel that you will pardon my intrusion when you know the nature of my business."

"Oh, yes; you are more than welcome, I assure you, for I just dispatched a cutter in chase of you, for I believed you at sea by this time."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and I would ask what your acquaintance may be with the Lady Lulu El Moro?"

"Señor, I came not here to be questioned, nor will I permit it."

"Ha! that is the way you talk, is it?"

"It is, señor, and the sooner you understand me the better."

And the words, added to the calm manner of the man, cowed the irate Mexican, who somehow felt that he was more in the power of the man before him than was his visitor in his power.

"What have you to say, sir?" he asked, haughtily, wondering if the Lady Lulu had made a confidant of the stranger of the double part that he was playing.

"I have to say, señor, that I am a comparative stranger in Vera Cruz; but it has come to my knowledge, how it matters not, that two vessels you are now fitting out for secret service are to be seized at sea ere the crews intended for them are taken on board."

"Ha! what do you mean by this?" cried Colonel Rublo, turning white with dread.

"I mean, señor, that among the men you are shipping as a working crew to take the vessels to the rendezvous, where their regular complement of officers and seamen are to join them, are pirates."

"How know you this?"

"I will not say how it is known to me, Colonel Rublo, but certain it is that the greater part of those who will man the schooners out of this port will be lagoon pirates."

"This is nonsense for I have officers picking the men who know well what they are about."

"You may think so, señor, but it is not so, and I have come here to warn you that those two vessels will never reach their destination, be that where it may, if you send them out under the men you have shipped to man them."

"I shall risk it, for I believe you are talking for gold."

"What sum could you pay me, Colonel Rublo, when I only a short while since paid into your hands a fortune to keep you from being swamped by your debts?"

"By Heaven! but you speak boldly, my fine fellow, for one in my power."

The stranger smiled, and asked:

"How am I in your power, señor?"

"Do you not know that I can have you seized and put in prison?"

"You certainly have the power to do so, señor; but will a colonel of the Mexican service persecute me who has befriended him with gold, and now comes to warn him that danger threatens a Government enterprise which he is at the head of?" and the stranger spoke indignantly.

"A colonel of Mexico, señor, will do his duty, as you shall see," and the Mexican touched the bell-rope.

Ponce appearing, Colonel Rublo said:

"Order the guard here!"

The stranger looked surprised, and said:

"Is it your intention to make me your prisoner, Señor Colonel?"

"It is."

"Upon what charge?" indignantly asked the stranger.

"I shall make my charge in due time, sir," was the reply, and just then the guard of a sub-officer and four men entered, for the colonel always kept soldiers near at hand for an emergency.

"Have you irons, sir?" sternly asked Colonel Rublo of the sub-officer.

"I have, Señor Colonel."

"Place them upon that man!"

The stranger stepped back as though he meant to resist; but evidently thinking better of it he submitted quietly, though his face paled with indignant anger.

"Now, sir, carry that prisoner to the prison, allow him to speak with no one, and bid Captain D'Uloa to place him in double irons in solitary confinement until he hears from me."

"Yes, Señor Colonel," answered the officer, and the mysterious stranger was led away

through the dark and deserted streets toward the city prison.

As they left the colonel's elegant quarters a man was passing rapidly, and glancing up saw the guard and their prisoner distinctly, by the aid of the swinging lamp before the door.

He started, half-stopped and then hurried away into the darkness, but halted when out of sight and awaited for the guard to pass.

Soon they did so, failing to see the form crouching in the shadow of an *adobe* wall.

After they had gone by he arose and stealthily followed until he saw them enter the prison.

Then he hastened away at a full run, and never stopped until he reached the shop of Jacobs the Jew.

The man was Israel, and breathlessly he told the old Jew what he had witnessed.

"You are sure it was the stranger, Israel?" asked Jacobs the Jew.

"Could I make a mistake in one who had so well served me, señor, and especially in a man such as he in appearance?" somewhat reproachfully answered the young Jew.

"No, that man could not be mistaken for another readily, and I will at once go to the prison and demand his release," and Jacobs the Jew set out upon his mission, while Israel remained in the shop to await his return.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TEMPTER.

At a quick step Jacobs the Jew went to the prison, and a guard admitted him into an ante-room, while another carried his name to Captain D'Uloa, the commandant of the prison.

"Is the captain in, señor?" he asked a young officer.

"Yes, señor, I just left him in his rooms," was the answer, and, glancing around to see that no one was near, he asked in a whisper:

"Señor Jacobs, will you not give me a few weeks longer on the interest of that loan, for I am pushed for funds just now?"

"Wait until the servant returns with your captain's answer, and bring word to me here," answered the Jew, and he walked into an adjoining room.

"Well, what said the captain?" asked the young officer, as the servant appeared.

"The captain is not in, señor," was the answer, and the Jew heard what was said from the next room.

Joining the Jew, the officer said:

"Señor Jacobs, Captain D'Uloa is not at home."

"So I heard the servant say, señor; but you said that he is, and it is very easy for you to misunderstand the servant's response, and you will, if you wish a couple of months' delay in that interest, so please conduct me to your captain," and the Jew spoke in a way that showed he was in earnest.

"*Caramba!* but I'll do it, for the words *not in* are so easily misunderstood."

"Come, señor, I'll lead you to the captain, as he sends word that he is in," and the young officer led the Jew along the corridor, knocking at the door of Captain D'Uloa just as the servant who had borne the message came rushing along the hallway, calling out:

"Señor, señor! the Señor Commandant is not in!"

But too late, for a voice within had bade the knocker enter, and the officer ushered the Jew into the room, quickly closing the door behind him.

Seated in an easy-chair, looking the picture of comfort, a cigar between his lips, was Captain D'Uloa.

He was a man who had the appearance of getting out of life all there was in it, and had a dissipated look.

When he beheld the Jew enter he uttered a malediction beneath his breath and sprung to his feet, while anger flashed in his eyes against the servant.

But he determined to make the best of it, and said:

"Ah, Señor Jacobs, be seated; glad to see you, though I cannot pay you the money I owe you this month."

"You've been living too fast again, Señor Commandant; but it was not about your debts I called to see you to-night," answered Jacobs, the Jew, in his dignified way.

"About what, then, may I ask, for to have a Jew call for any other purpose than to get money is a surprise I never had before," rudely said the officer.

But the Jew appeared not to notice the remark and said:

"You have a prisoner here, señor, that—"

"I have a number under my charge; do they owe you, too? If so, a man has not even the pleasure of being out of debt when in jail."

"The one I refer to, señor, I owe a debt I can never repay, I fear."

"Indeed! it must then be an enormous sum, for you are credited with having more gold in your old ruin than the Government has in its treasury."

"I have ample for my wants, señor."

"And the wants of others too, it seems; but what of the prisoner?"

"I have come to ask of you his release."

"Who is he?"

"A handsome young man, brought here not an hour ago as a prisoner of Colonel Rublo's."

"Ha! that fellow again; why, he was my prisoner to-day once before, and Colonel Rublo sent a veiled lady here and ordered his release, and here, soon after he is a second time imprisoned, you come asking his freedom."

"I do, señor."

"Well, give me the order from the colonel."

"I have no order from him, Señor Commandant."

"Then the man stays where he is."

"You cannot take the responsibility releasing him?"

"No indeed, for somehow Colonel Rublo's prisoners are sacred, and off would go my official head did I act without his orders."

"Señor, you are indebted to me four thousand three hundred dollars, including interest."

"Jew, I know that as well as you do," hotly said the officer.

"I will give you a receipt in full for the amount, Señor D'Uloa, if you will let the prisoner go."

The commandant sprung upon his feet excitedly and cried:

"By the Eagle of Mexico! I would gladly do it, did I dare."

"Can you not take the responsibility, señor?"

"No, Señor Jacobs, I cannot."

"I will add to the amount you owe me gold sufficient to make the sum five thousand."

The Mexican turned pale, and pacing to and fro seemed greatly excited.

"No, no, I dare not do it."

"I will add another thousand, Señor Commandant," and Jacobs, the Jew, closely watched the face of the officer he tempted.

"What is this prisoner to you, Señor Jacobs?" he asked.

"Señor Commandant, he once saved my life."

"Who is he?"

"Señor, upon my word I do not know."

"And yet you seek to get him out of prison."

"Yes, señor."

"How knew you that he was a prisoner?"

"He was seen to leave Colonel Rublo's quarters in irons."

"Ah! there is just the trouble, for, were he any other prisoner in these old walls, I could take the responsibility."

"Can you not allow him to escape?"

"Not when my orders are to put him in double irons, and place him in solitary confinement."

"Are such your orders?" quickly asked the Jew.

"They are."

"Well, señor, if you choose to disobey them, and release that prisoner, upon any excuse you care to make, I will give you your debt and ten thousand dollars this very night."

"*Madre de Dios!* man, you would tempt a saint."

"No! no! I cannot do it," cried the officer, excitedly.

"Name your price, señor," calmly said the Jew.

"It is my honor you wish to buy, Jew, and it is not for sale—especially where one of Rublo's prisoners are concerned," and he added the last words in a low tone.

"Then I shall have to go to Colonel Rublo!"

"Yes, but you can do nothing with that iron man."

"I can but try."

"You cannot get the prisoner out to-night, señor, even upon his order."

"Yes, if you so please."

"It is against Government orders to open the dungeons after this hour."

"That order you will break, señor."

"You are mistaken, for I will not."

"Señor, I shall offer upon my return, with an order from Colonel Rublo to release the prisoner, to cancel your debt, if you will let that prisoner out to-night."

"By the Eagle! but you are generous, and I will await your return, to show my good will; but you can never move Christo Rublo."

"You shall see."

"What! does he owe you money too?"

"Not one dollar."

"Then you can do nothing with him, though if he was your debtor you might, for the man that owes is a slave to the one who is his creditor."

"I will return soon, señor, with the order," and with this confident assertion Jacobs the Jew left the quarters of the prison commandant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ACCUSING A PADRE.

COLONEL RUBLO felt ill at ease after the departure from his rooms of the mysterious stranger in irons.

He feared the stranger might talk, and if he wished to do so, he could say ugly things about him.

He could not understand about the stranger's being in town, when Gringo had said he saw him go on the little vessel with Lady Lulu and leave the port.

So he sent for Gringo, the Spy, and asked him about this discrepancy of his story.

The spy was equal to the emergency, and said that he had discovered that while the lady sailed in the little vessel, the stranger, after seeing her started on her way, had come ashore in a small boat.

The fact was, Gringo had seen the two go on board the craft, which at once got under way, and he had adjourned to a neighboring tavern where he could get a glass of *aguardiente*, and took it for granted that the stranger had also sailed in the coaster.

Having settled his mind on this point, Colonel Rublo sent to the tavern where El Moro was stopping under an assumed name and in Wandering-Jew-like disguise, and ordered that worthy to come to his quarters.

It was not long before the pretended old man put in an appearance, and Colonel Rublo said abruptly:

"Well, I have found your daughter."

"No!"

"And lost her."

"What, señor?"

"She was here to-day."

"In town?"

"Yes; and in my quarters."

"Can it be possible?"

"Yes; she came to get me to release a prisoner, whom my men had secured."

"A prisoner, señor?"

"Yes; a tall, splendid-looking fellow, strong as a lion and as brave."

"Her peon servant, Zuma, the sailing-master of her *goleta*."

"This man was no peon, Señor El Moro."

"No! who was he then?"

"That is what I would like to have you tell me."

"How should I know?"

"Do you not know a man of your band that answers to my description?"

"I certainly do not, señor."

"Who sailed with her from the stronghold?"

"Her skipper, Zuma, the peon, the crew, and Zuma, her maid."

"No one else?"

"Ah, yes! a priest, whom I picked up at sea and allowed to go free, and whom Lady Lulu brought here with her."

"Was he a man such as I describe?"

"Not unlike, by any means, for he was a fine-looking fellow for a padre and well-formed, too."

"That is the man, then; but he has thrown aside his priestly garb."

"What do you mean, Señor Rublo?"

"I have met him several times, and never in a padre's robe, and my men were on the hunt for him for an offense committed, and captured him."

"Then lo! up comes your daughter, the Lady Lulu, asking for a release for one of her crew, and I gave it to her, and set a man on her track, and he brings me word that she went to the prison, got the man out, and he happened to be this priest, and that they sailed to-night out of the port."

"Sailed?"

"So he stated; but when she left in her little craft the padre remained, for he was here to-night and I had my guard seize him and he is now in the prison."

"Good! and your intention regarding him, señor?"

"To have him executed at once."

"A padre?"

"Yes, when he is as dangerous as *tn* man is."

"You know best, Señor Colonel."

"I shall do as I say, El Moro, for that man, having thrown aside his priestly garb—and who knows that he really was a priest?—may become a dangerous rival of mine for your daughter's hand."

"I hope not, señor."

"And so do I; but, believing the man was on board the vessel with your daughter, I sent a cutter after the craft."

"I hope that she may not catch the *goleta*, for Lulu is a girl that will not be driven to anything; but what could the padre have called upon you for?"

"To coolly inform me that he knew that my officers on the schooners were shipping pirates in disguise, and that the vessels would be seized once they were at sea."

"How knew he this, señor?"

"I know not; and he refused to say aught of the Lady Lulu, and, fearing the man, and believing that he has it in him to betray you, as well as myself, I sent him to solitary confinement in the prison, and I shall take the responsibility of going there to-night, having a platoon detailed, and march him out, gagged and ironed, and have him shot."

"It is a good plan, Señor Rublo; but if he proves to be a padre it will bring you bad luck."

"I shall risk that, for he is a man to bring me worse luck should he live; and he knows too much, and must die."

"Now I will say good-night, and if there is anything of importance to communicate, and should the cutter return with the *goleta*, I will send for you."

El Moro bowed, and took his leave, and Col-

onel Rublo was throwing on his cloak to start to the prison when Ponce came in and announced Jacobs the Jew.

"What can that old Satan want here at this hour of the night?" growled the Mexican, and then he added aloud:

"Say I cannot see him."

"He says, Señor Master, that you must see him, for it is most important," was the answer. Colonel Rublo dared not refuse, and so he said fiercely.

"Show him in then!" and a moment after in walked Jacobs the Jew, bearding the lion in his den though it was after midnight.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TELL-TALE JEWELS.

"WELL, Señor Jacobs, this is a late hour to make a call," said Colonel Rublo in a disagreeable way.

"Did you wish gold to gamble with at night, señor, you would not hesitate to call me up," was the answer.

"You don't mean that you have come for gold?"

"Oh, no, Señor Colonel, not to you would I come if I needed gold; but I have come to see you upon an important matter."

"Well, out with it, Jew, for I have an engagement."

"And so have I, señor, so we are quits," and the Jew calmly took a seat, while Colonel Rublo uttered a muttered oath.

"Be seated, señor, and be sure that no one is near to overhear," said Jacobs.

Another muttered malediction, and the colonel walked to the door and threw it open.

The act threw Ponce over on his back, for that worthy was in a stooping posture and had his ear at the keyhole.

Ere the frightened peon could rise to his feet the colonel was upon him, a dirk in his hand, and the blade sunk deep into the heart of the listener.

"That silences his tongue," was the grim remark, as the Mexican coolly wiped his blade upon the clothing of the peon and reentered his room from the corridor, leaving his victim lying dead where he had fallen.

So quickly and silently had the assassin done his work, that the Jew had not seemed to mistrust wrong, and sat where the colonel had left him, awaiting his return from the hall.

This the Mexican saw, and he said calmly:

"There is no one near to hear, Señor Jew, so quickly say what you have to."

"I came, Colonel Rublo, to ask the release of a prisoner now in Captain D'Uloa's keeping."

"Ah! who is it there that you are interested in?"

"A man whom you sent there in irons to-night."

"Ha! that fellow?" and the colonel slightly started.

"Yes, señor, a man who saved the life of my young clerk, Israel, and in whom I am deeply interested."

"Well, Señor Jew, your interest will do you no good."

"You are mistaken."

"I say no."

"Of what do you accuse him?"

"He is a traitor."

"To what?"

"To Mexico."

"He is no Mexican."

"No, but I have reason to believe him a pirate."

"I feel that you persecute him because he proved himself your master."

"Ho, Jew! be wary of your words."

"I say just what I intend, señor, and you have no right to throw a man into double irons and place him in solitary confinement simply because you hate him, or fear him, doubtless both."

"Jew, I'll have my guard hurl you into the street, if you do not keep a civil tongue within your teeth," and the colonel arose in a threatening manner as though to call aid.

"Colonel Rublo, they may stumble over the man that you killed an instant ago for eaves-dropping."

"See, rub from your hand the blood-stain, for it may betray you."

"*Caramba!* he deserved his fate," cried the colonel, his own words betraying his act, and as he sprang to his feet to wash away the stain there came a heavy fall without, followed by a cry of alarm.

Springing to the door, the Mexican threw it open, to behold a lancero struggling to his feet, the picture of terror.

"Ha! what meansthis? *Caramba!* my faithful Ponce dead?" he cried, in well-feigned alarm.

"Oh, Señor Colonel, I was coming to tell you that I had seen a man dodging about the grounds and I fell over poor Ponce here in the darkness, and dead," cried the lancero.

"You come too late, guard, for the man has slain Ponce, as you see."

"Call out the guard, and have a thorough search made, and have this body removed."

The lancero departed hastily, crossing himself as he walked away, and the colonel returned to

the room, where the Jew still sat seemingly unconcerned.

"Now, Jew, you may go, for I tell you that I know the prisoner to be a traitor, and he shall be shot as such."

"Colonel Rublo, I am no man to make an idle threat, but if you do not give me an instant order for that man's release, you shall change places with him within the hour," and the voice of Jacobs, the Jew, rung out in threatening earnestness.

"Ha! you dare threaten me?" and the Mexican placed his hand upon his sword-hilt.

"Colonel Rublo, you hold immense power, and you are believed to be faithful; but I can prove to the contrary, and then your head will fall quickly."

"See here, Colonel Rublo, chief of the Secret League, I too have spies, for in my business I need them, and I know you pretty much as you are, and not as you are believed to be."

"You do not wish a quarrel with me, so give me an order for the release of that prisoner."

"I will not, Jew, and you cannot frighten me."

"So be it, señor; I shall go at once to the Commander-General of the *San Juan d'Uloa* and tell him that a pirate has brought me treasure on several occasions, and, as a most remarkable circumstance there were some odd jewels, such as earrings, and shoe and knee buckles that were missing; but then you brought some jewels to me to turn into gold for you, and odd enough *there were the missing pieces that made up the pairs.*"

Colonel Rublo turned deadly pale, and the Jew continued:

"I have all these jewels laid away, those the pirate bought with his name attached, and those that you left with me with your signature on the paper infolding them, for you may remember that I asked you to write it."

"Bah! this is but an accident, for I bought the jewels from a sailor."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know."

"You should have arrested him as a pirate, for the possessor of such jewels could be nothing else, unless, like yourself, he is the ally of a pirate."

"Ha! you dare charge me with piracy?" and the man trembled from head to foot.

"I now charge you with being the secret ally of El Moro, and if you do not give me an order for the release of that poor prisoner, I shall go at once to the Commandant-General and place the whole truth before him as I know it to be," was the deliberate response of Jacobs the Jew.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ESCAPE.

"WHAT! back again, and just as I had given you up?" cried Captain D'Uloa, as Jacobs the Jew was ushered into his room two hours after his departure on his errand to see Colonel Rublo.

"Yes, Señor Captain, I have returned."

"And I have just heard that some assassin was making his way to Colonel Rublo's room with the intention of revenge for some act, or robbery, when he was met in the corridor by the colonel's faithful peon slave, and killed him, thereby managing to escape."

"Yes, the peon was killed while I was with Colonel Rublo," quietly said the Jew.

"And I hope the assassin will be captured for I have sent a score of my best men on the hunt for him; but your returning seems to promise that you gained an order for the release of the prisoner?"

"I did, Señor Captain, and here it is," and Jacobs the Jew handed forth a paper bearing a seal thereon.

"This is correct, Jew, and yet I cannot understand how you got it from Rublo, for he seemed to wish to hold that prisoner particularly."

"I suppose he felt that he was wrong in his surmise against him, señor."

"But once before he had him imprisoned here, and then released him, a lady bringing the order, and I am confident that she was young and beautiful, though she was enveloped in a mantilla, and her vail completely concealed her face."

"Well, I suppose you wish your man now?"

"As soon as I write you a receipt for your dues to me, Señor Captain."

"By the Aztec Eagle, but you are generous, Señor Jacobs, and you have taken a weight off my mind and heart that was as heavy as iron, for I tell you frankly I was pressed to the wall financially; but this clears me and puts me ahead, and any service I can render you, command me."

"I thank you, captain," and the Jew wrote the receipt in full for the captain's debt to him, and the latter said, as he folded it away:

"I will go with you myself to release the prisoner, señor."

The two descended from the captain's rooms, and passing the sentinel at the door of the corridor leading to the cells, walked slowly along in the dim light until they reached a pair of stone steps which led down to the dungeon

where the mysterious stranger had been imprisoned.

"Ha! the key in the cell door! what does this mean?"

And Captain D'Uloa threw open the iron door and looked within.

"Our prisoner is here," he cried, as he held his lantern above his head, and then added:

"But we will have to wait for the coming of Lieutenant Manuel, the jailer, for he has the keys— Ha! what is this?"

"Ho, Manuel! is this you?"

"It is Manuel, by Heaven! and in the irons of that prisoner, while he is also gagged."

And the prison commandant held his lantern full in the face of the man, who was seated upon a low bench, ironed heavily and held against the wall.

He was a young officer, with a tall, slender form, and his outer clothing had been removed, while he was securely gagged and ironed.

Tearing the gag from his mouth, Captain D'Uloa asked excitedly:

"Señor Manuel, how is this?"

With an effort the young officer answered:

"It is the work of that iron-handed prisoner whom I placed in this cell a few hours ago."

"Explain, please."

"When going my rounds, remembering your strict orders regarding the man, I came here with my lantern to see that he was all right."

"To my amazement, I did not see him ironed against the wall, and unlocking the door to discover the cause, I was seized in a grip which I could not shake off, and while his clutch at my throat prevented an outcry, he dragged me to the floor, gagged me, in spite of my fierce resistance, and then ironed me as you see."

"This is astounding."

"His strength is astounding, señor, for he grasped my arm with a grip that broke it; see!" And the young officer showed that his right arm hung helpless at his side.

Then he continued:

"He had freed himself with false keys he had about him, and then evidently lay in wait for the coming of the rounds, determined to make a desperate effort to escape."

"My coming alone aided him, and taking my clothing he drew it on over his own, threw my cloak over his shoulders, drew my hat over his eyes, seized my lantern and said:

"Señor, I am very sorry to use a man roughly who is doing his duty, but self-preservation is the first law of nature."

"Adios," and with this he left the cell, and I do not doubt but that he boldly walked past the sentinel, who could not look upon him as anyone else than myself."

"I shall soon know. Ho! the guard! the guard! Alarm! alarm!"

And Captain D'Uloa's voice rung through the prison corridors, bringing the night watch at a double-quick to the dungeon.

A few questions, and it was found that the prisoner had passed out, lantern in hand, all believing that it was Lieutenant Manuel, the keeper.

"Well, Señor Jacobs, I will not raise an alarm, as you have orders for his release, and, except that he used poor Manuel rather roughly, he has done no great harm."

"Does my receipt hold good, now that the prisoner has escaped?"

"Certainly, señor, for you have done your duty; but I would give much to find that man," and the Jew bade the prison commandant good-night and walked slowly homeward, muttering to himself:

"That man is indeed a mystery, a wonderful mystery, but I must find him."

As he reached his door a tall form stepped out from the shadow of the wall and confronted him.

"Ho, señor, I mean you no harm: but I came here to see you, and have awaited your coming, as your clerk said you were away from home."

"Abraham be praised that I have found you," cried Jacobs, the Jew, earnestly, as he recognized in the man before him the mysterious stranger whom he had so longed to find.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SAILOR OF FORTUNE.

WHEN Jacobs, the Jew, recognized who it was that had confronted him at his own door, he grasped the hand of the stranger, saying earnestly:

"At last we meet face to face, señor, and I have it in my power to thank you; but come in with me, for here you shall be at home, I assure you."

He opened a door in the wall as he spoke, and drew the stranger in after him.

A light burned in the hall, and the Jew led his visitor up a pair of stairs to a floor above and threw open a door that revealed a large and luxuriously-furnished room.

"This is my sanctum, my retreat from business and care, señor, so be seated," he said, his voice showing his delight at having found the stranger to whom he owed so much.

There were books innumerable in the room, and in several languages, Persian rugs that were like cushions beneath the feet, easy-chairs

and a sideboard upon which had been spread a tempting lunch, flanked by decanters of wine.

"They have not forgotten my late supper, señor, and you must join me, and then we can talk."

"But, señor, the night is nearly gone, and I will not keep you up, though to be frank with you, I took the liberty of coming here to ask if you would give me a hiding-place in the ruined part of your dwelling for a few days, as I am at present in need of friendly aid, and I presumed upon my having met you to ask this," and the stranger spoke with perfect frankness.

"My dear señor, I must tell you that I have sought you since the night you saved my clerk's life, and it has been a thorn in my heart that I have not been able to find you, and but now I came from the prison, where I went with an order for your release from Colonel Rublo."

"Indeed! he was the man who placed me there," said the stranger, in surprise.

"So I know, señor; but I prevailed upon him to release you, for Israel, whose life you saved, saw the guards carry you away a prisoner, and came to me with the news; but let me tell you that this is your home, for a spare room adjoins this one, and there you can be comfortable as long as you please, for you are my guest."

"Now, let us lunch, and over a glass of wine we can become better acquainted with each other."

"You are most kind to me, señor, and in a few words I can tell you that I am a wanderer now, a waif upon the world, and I hoped to-day, by informing Colonel Rublo of a plot I had discovered for pirates to capture two schooners which he was fitting out, that I could get a position in the Mexican service; but he treated my information with contempt, and threw me into prison, and I sought you to ask you to give me a hiding-place until I could leave the country, for I well know what to expect as a prisoner of Mexico."

"You could only expect death at the hands of Christo Rublo, señor, for I know him; but you say you have discovered a plot to capture the two beautiful schooners that are being fitted out as cruisers?"

"Yes, señor."

"Señor, to save those vessels you should indeed have a commission in the Mexican service; but you could not get it here, and I can suggest to you a career, if you are a sailor, which will bring you a fortune."

"I am a sailor, señor, and I am willing to be the possessor of a fortune, if I could win it with my sword, for I am a poor man, with not a hundred dollars to my name."

"And what is your name, señor?" asked the Jew, adding:

"I am known here as Jacobs the Jew, and Jew Jacobs, just as they please to call me; but my name is Jacob Lindo."

The young man bowed, and his face flushed, as the Jew asked his name, while he said sadly:

"For reasons which I now cannot explain, I too bear two names, señor, and to you I may be known as Señor Del Monte."

"I am not one to inquire into your antecedents, señor, and the name of Del Monte will serve me as well as your own."

"I owe you my life, and you saved the youth Israel from death, and you have placed me under obligations I can never repay, Señor Del Monte; but I am desirous of serving you, and it is in my power to do so, so I wish you to frankly tell me all that I can do for you, for my gold is as though it were your own, and I believe that you are the very one to carve out a fortune for yourself in the manner in which I can suggest."

"And that suggestion, señor?" quietly asked the young sailor.

"You are a sailor, and you are one to rule your fellow-men, I can see that, and I would place you upon the quarter-deck of an armed vessel."

"As I care not to inquire in regard to what Mexican officers may, or may not do, I will say nothing of this intended seizure of the two schooners, which you tell me of, but take advantage of the circumstance to gain one of them for you."

"But how can this be done, señor?" eagerly asked Del Monte.

"As they go to sea with a pirate crew, intending to seize them, you might arrange it to hide on board of the best one of the schooners with a party of men, and when the pirates have seized the vessel, you can, in turn, take her from them."

"It could be done, señor, if the night watch over the vessel, the night before they sail, could be bribed to let us conceal ourselves on board; but what then, after the craft is in my possession?"

"Then, Señor Del Monte, you are to set out on the cruise that is to win you a name and fortune."

"In what service, señor?"

"That you shall know in good time, señor; but it is time now that you sought rest, so I will show you to your room, and in the morning you will breakfast with my daughter and myself, for I have a daughter, Señor Del Monte, who will be happy to meet and thank the brave man who saved her father from death," and taking a lamp the Jew led his mysterious guest into a most

charming little room, where in a bed as soft as down the young sailor of fortune soon forgot himself in dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OLD SAILOR.

"ADINAH, my child, I have a guest to present to you."

"He will soon join us at breakfast," said Jacobs the Jew the next morning, as the maiden swept into the breakfast room, looking most lovely in a morning robe, and some fresh flowers in her hair.

"A guest, father?" asked Adinah, with surprise.

"Yes, my child, and you will have to guard well your little heart that it be not pierced by the finest eyes I ever saw in a man's head," said the Jew, playfully.

"Forewarned is forearmed, father," was the laughing rejoinder.

"Well, he is a splendid-looking man, my child, and when I tell you that he it was who saved Israel from Colonel Rublo's sword, and also my life, you will know that he is one who deserves your gratitude."

"Oh, father! is it the mysterious stranger of whom I have heard you and Israel speak so often?" cried Adinah, in surprised pleasure.

"It is, my child."

"Why, he seems, from all accounts, to be a man of giant strength, unknowing fear, a marvelous swordsman, and a mystery, while you now tell me that he is dangerously handsome."

"You can judge for yourself, Adinah, of the man, for Mordecai is conducting him hither," and the Jew advanced to meet Del Monte, who just then came from the corridor into the breakfast-room.

He was dressed in seaman's attire, a kind of undress uniform, and as the eyes of Adinah fell upon his superb form and strangely handsome face, she fairly started, for never before, did she mentally confess, had she beheld a more superb being than the one who bent low before her, when her father presented him.

"Señor Del Monte, accept my gratitude for all that you have done for me, through saving my loved father from death," said Adinah, earnestly, grasping his hand warmly in both her own.

"Señorita, my nature is to protect the weak against the strong, and it so happened that thereby I was enabled to aid your father," answered Del Monte, and his voice was musical and deep-toned.

"And Israel owes you his life, too, Señor Del Monte, for I have heard all."

"An accident aided him, señorita, as I came to seek your father, on a matter of business, that night, and was so fortunate as to arrive in time to be of service to one who needed aid."

"You are modest, señor; but that does not lessen the obligation we are under to you; but be seated, please, and accept our hospitalities as no more than your due."

It was an enjoyable breakfast seemingly to the three gathered there, and when an hour after meeting Adinah the Jew led his guest away for a business-talk, the maiden murmured:

"Father was right in saying that I should shield my heart against his eyes, for, alas! I am already in love, and my love once awakened is life to me."

What was said by the Jew to his guest need not be made known, but certain it is that Del Monte seemed to acquiesce in the plans of the Señor Jacobs, as, completely disguised as an old sailor by the skillful hands of Israel, the young man left the Haunted Citadel early in the afternoon and wended his steps slowly down through the town toward the shore, evidently upon some special duty.

Arriving at the shore, he soon found out where the two schooners were being fitted out, and stood for a long time gazing with seeming deep interest upon the scene.

At last he spoke to a sailor near and asked if they were shipping any new men for the cruise.

"Only mighty few, shipmate; you don't want a berth, do you?" was the answer.

"I thought how I'd like to smell salt water again for a little voyage."

"This is not going to be a little voyage, old man, and time is fetching you too near Davy Jones's locker for you to talk about going to sea; better stay ashore now with those that love you," said the seaman, in a kindly way.

"Young man, I've got no home, and no one loves me."

"I'm old, but I'm active, and on board ship is where I wish to live and die, so I'd like to ship if you think they'd take me."

"Old shipmate, I like you, and there's many a little thing you could help in aboard, and I'll just say, as I'm boatswain, go aboard when you please, and when the craft sails you'll be there, for 'twixt you and me, old man, there will be a little money divided round on this cruise, and I'd like to have you get a share to keep you when you are older than you are now."

"Then you are serving for gold, messmate?" said the supposed old sailor.

"That's the way to log it, shipmate; it is

gold I go for, and where I can get the most I ship."

"And there are others on board your way of thinking, doubtless?"

"There are."

"Well, my nice young man, I'd like to go on this cruise, and I wish you to point out to me just those who love gold more than country, and maybe this will help you to pick them out better."

And the pretended old sailor placed in the hand of the surprised boatswain a purse heavy with gold.

"Messmate, I don't think you are as old as you look, and I'm thinking your latter days are pretty well provided for, if you can scatter around gold like this," said the seaman, meaningly.

"I've got the mate to that purse for every man you think can be trusted on board this ship to follow an old sailor's lead."

"I can sound 'em all, and my word for it, sir, that when you say hard a-starboard, there won't be any that goes to port."

"Well, see to it yourself, my friend, and take this little gem as a souvenir that an old sailor means what he says," and Del Monte slipped a ring containing a rare stone upon the finger of the boatswain.

"Whew! you are a king in disguise, sir, I'm thinking, and Boatswain Brail is your friend," cried the delighted seaman.

"It is the larger schooner of the two that I wish to ship on."

"Yes, sir, she's the best of the two, and I'll be disappointed if she hasn't got it in her to walk away from anything in these waters."

"How many men go on her?"

"An officer, sir, myself, and twenty men, which are ten more seamen than she first intended to run out with, for there's talk of her picking up a full crew elsewhere."

"And the other schooner?"

"She leads, sir, for that old man you see yonder, that looks like Santa Claus, is the pilot, and he goes in her," and the seaman pointed to none other than the disguised El Moro, the Corsair Commodore, who was talking with an officer not far distant.

"And what number of men carries the other craft?"

"About the same force, sir, an officer, the pilot, and some twenty men."

"I see; well, I'll be on hand in time, and I'll just give you a little extra gold, as earnest to let the men know that you mean what you say," and slipping some gold into the hands of the boatswain, the old sailor walked away, the amazed and delighted recipient of his bounty gazing after him with the remark:

"I've struck a king in disguise, I reckon, for he gives gold as he might grog."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNMASKED.

COLONEL RUBLO was utterly amazed the morning after the escape of Del Monte, the mysterious stranger, to learn that, before his release could be delivered, the prisoner had boldly made his escape.

"I know of no man to be more dreaded than he, who even defies dungeons, chains and locks, and I must end his days in some way."

"Ah! I have a thought, and I will make use of it to get rid of him."

"My whole force shall at once be put upon his track, and I will find him if I have to arrest every man in town who is a stranger, to discover if he wears a disguise."

"Then, when he is taken, I'll put him in the heaviest irons, and send him on board the schooner that El Moro goes as pilot on, and leave it to him to get rid of the fellow as soon as he is out in deep water."

So mused Colonel Rublo, and a pull on his bell-rope brought a servant, one who had stepped into the shoes of Ponce, the peon.

Dispatching the servant on an errand, it was not very long before Colonel Rublo's quarters were thronged with officers of high and low grade, for they had come from the prison, the fortified ports, the city guard, and even the castle of the gloomy fortress of San Juan d'Uloa, the "iron gate of Vera Cruz," as that stronghold is called.

Explaining to the officers that the mysterious stranger was a dangerous plotter against the Government, Colonel Rublo soon had the satisfaction of seeing the officers depart, and knew that within an hour a hundred or more well-trained spies would be on the track of the man he so feared, while the soldiery of the town would be on the watch for him.

To urge them the more in their search, the Mexican colonel had offered a thousand pesos to the man who captured the prisoner.

"He'll be on board the schooner and at sea before the Jew can possibly know of his capture, so that he cannot force me to set him free," he muttered, gleefully.

Colonel Rublo had given orders that every stranger in town should be arrested, and if found to wear a disguise should at once be brought before him.

In obedience to this command three soldiers of the Lancero League pounced upon a suspicious-

looking personage in the afternoon, and upon a closer examination of him, discovered that he was most thoroughly disguised.

In vain he pleaded that he was masquerading as a joke, on a wager with some comrades; they would not release him, and he was dragged into the presence of Colonel Rublo, while one of the captors cried:

"Señor Colonel, we captured this man, as he looked suspicious like, and here are his disguises, a false beard and wig—see for yourself, Señor Colonel!"

"*Caramba!* they have captured and unmasked El Moro," Colonel Rublo said through his shut teeth, and springing to his feet, he cried, sternly:

"Fools! you have taken one of my own spies; begone! and learn to do your work better in future."

The three soldiers skulked away, one of them remarking disconsolately:

"How are we to know what to do after this, comrades?"

The other two could return no answer, and utterly crushed by their despair, at the loss of the thousand pesos, which they had supposed they had earned, they departed, leaving the unmasked Corsair Commodore with the Mexican officer.

"Well, El Moro, it is lucky for you that your captors were soldiers and not sailors, or you might have been recognized," said the officer, when he was alone with the pirate.

"True, señor, and your order came pretty near costing me my life; but I would have depended upon you to get me free."

"I would have done what I could for you; but is there any news?"

"The schooners will be ready to sail to-morrow night."

"Then you can sail them, and that agony will be over with, for I wish to see the schooners in your possession."

"You are not more anxious than I am, señor."

"And I am anxious to know about your daughter, the Lady Lulu, and if she has found a lover in this man you say you believed to be a padre, but whom I think is an English officer from some man-of-war, playing a deep game of some kind."

"Señor, the padre I referred to was a Spaniard, and more, I picked him up at sea in a drifting boat, and he was then in priestly garb."

"Then he cannot be the one who appears as this mysterious stranger, for he is an Englishman, I am certain."

"I cannot place him, señor, for my officers of rank are Captains Duluth, Bandero and Del Norte, and these I left at the lagoon stronghold when I sailed for this port."

"Can you think of no one else, El Moro, that it could be?"

"No one, señor."

"Well, I am moving heaven and earth to capture him, and I believe that I will do so."

"I hope so, señor, for I confess to a great curiosity to behold the man you say that my daughter got out of prison and who went on the *goleta* with her, as though to sail for the stronghold, yet soon after appeared here in your quarters."

"And if I capture him, El Moro, I shall send him at once on board of your schooner, to put in irons, and when you are at sea have him thrown overboard, with his chains on him to sink him to perdition," said the colonel, savagely.

"You forget, Colonel Rublo, that I am simply engaged as the pilot, and your officers will be in charge of the vessels until we reach a certain point of the coast."

"Ah, yes; well, I'll give orders that he be kept in irons until you are in possession of the vessels, and then, you pledge me, that you will do with him as I say?"

"Throw him into the sea?"

"Yes."

"Better force him to turn pirate, if he is the man you describe him to be."

"And live in dread of the gallows myself? No, no, El Moro, you must do as I say with the man."

"Well, señor, it is catching before hanging; but if you do catch him, send him on board, and I'll do as you wish."

"You pledge your word on this?"

"I do, Señor Rublo."

"Enough; for I know that it will be done, as pirate though you are, you are a man of your word."

"Now resume your disguise and go on board the schooner, and if you'll take my advice you will stay there."

El Moro resumed his disguise, which his three captors had torn off of him, and left the quarters of Colonel Rublo, who, as he knew that he was just then the talk of the town, on account of the supposed attempted assassination of the night before, when Ponce lost his life, he strolled out to give the people a look at him, and thus cater to his inordinate vanity.

Later in the afternoon he took a boat and went down to the San Juan d'Uloa Castle, to see the Commandante-General, and inform him that his schooners would set sail the following night.

Returning at a late hour, after remaining to supper in the gloomy fortress, Colonel Rublo

sought his quarters and retired, for he was beginning to feel the strain upon him.

The next morning he breakfasted late, and then heard the report of his spies.

In their eagerness to get the reward the spies had been over-zealous, and hundreds of people had been arrested, and afterward set free, when they proved not to be the mysterious stranger, about whom the whole town was excited.

Returning from a ride just before sunset, Colonel Rublo was told that a man had been taken who wore a disguise, and was the exact counterpart of the one he sought.

"Where is he?" eagerly asked the Mexican officer.

"Awaiting under guard in your private room, señor," was the answer.

With quick step Christo Rublo strode into the room, and a cry of joy burst from his lips as his eyes fell upon the man that two lanceros held there as a prisoner.

One glance, and Colonel Rublo recognized the mysterious stranger, for the false beard and wig that he wore to impersonate an old sailor had been taken from him, and the handsome, fearless face of Del Monte was revealed.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A DOUBLE REWARD.

"MEN, you have well earned your money, and as there are two of you I will give each of you a thousand pesos."

So said Colonel Rublo, as he beheld the prisoner and his two captors awaiting him in his room.

"Thank you, Señor Colonel, but it took five of us to capture him, for he is a fearful man to handle," said one of the soldiers, who would have been satisfied with the thousand pesos, the reward offered, but, seeing the generosity of the colonel, and his delight at the capture, determined to strive to get far more, and depend upon the compliment he paid the prisoner, about his being a fearful man to handle, to keep him quiet.

"I know what his strength is, and I do not doubt but that you had a terrible time capturing him, so I will give you a thousand each for your other comrades; but why did they not come with you?" said the colonel, who was in a most generous mood, and the prisoner smiled grimly, as the spokesman of his captors answered:

"They were a trifle bruised, Señor Colonel, so went to get the surgeon to patch them up."

"Ah! brave fellows, I hope their wounds are not serious?"

"Oh, no, Señor Colonel."

"Now, tell me, men, how you managed to find the prisoner, and then capture him?"

"He was lying asleep among some bales on the shore, and I happened to see that his false beard did not fit well, so called to my comrades, and we threw ourselves upon him, and after a struggle that was terrible we made him a prisoner."

"You did well, my men, and I will pay you your money as soon as you have taken your prisoner on board one of the Americanschooners fitting out in the harbor."

"Yes, señor, we know them."

"You are to go to the one on which you will find the old pilot, any of the crew can tell you where to find him, and you are to say that my orders are to put the prisoner in the hold."

"Then return to me with the receipt of the officer in command and you shall have your two thousand pesos."

"Five thousand, Señor Colonel, you said you would give us," corrected the cunning spokesman.

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten; but now put these double irons upon the prisoner, and I will keep the keys," and Colonel Rublo turned to a closet and took therefrom manacles for the wrists and ankles, while he added, as he drew a pistol:

"Submit, Sir Prisoner, or I send a bullet through your brain."

"I have no intention, Colonel Rublo, of resisting Fate," was the calm reply of Del Monte.

"It is well for you that you do not, sir."

"There, now you have him secure, men, and I will order a *volante* for you to take him in, as he cannot walk in those iron manacles."

A servant was sent for a vehicle, and soon after the men departed with their prisoner.

As they drove off in the *volante*, Del Monte said quietly, addressing the spokesman of the two, and whom his comrade had called Pedro:

"Pedro, you and Juan have done well, for you did catch me asleep, and with a pistol at my head when I awoke. I did not care to resist, for I am no fool to throw away my life on a certainty of death."

"So you took me to your colonel, and your lie will bring you five thousand pesos, that is twenty-five hundred each."

"Am I not right?"

"You are, señor," said Pedro, while Juan nodded.

"Now, five thousand pesos is a large sum to you, I know; but I can tell you just how you can make five thousand pesos each."

"Ah, señor!" gasped the two men.

"You are to take me to the schooner which the old pilot, your master spoke of, is not on board of."

"Señor."

"The officer on board that vessel you will tell that Colonel Rublo sent you to him with me as a prisoner, to be placed in the hold in irons, for safe-keeping, and you will take his receipt for me."

"But, señor, we—"

"Listen to me, Pedro and Juan."

"Yes, señor."

"You will say that the old pilot told you that he had changed his mind about going on the smaller vessel, and that he would sail in the larger one; this you are to tell the colonel."

"Yes, señor."

"This word from the old pilot will satisfy him, and you are to tell the commanding officer that Colonel Rublo says that the two vessels are to at once put to sea."

"Yes, señor."

"As soon as you have taken me on board, go ashore and wait until you see the schooners sail, and then return to Colonel Rublo and make your report as I have told you."

"But, señor, what about the five thousand pesos?"

"Pedro, feel in my breast pocket for a purse."

The man did so, and drew out a purse full of money.

"There are in here something over the five thousand pesos, but take it, and when you return to Colonel Rublo he will pay you the amount he promised and you will each have the sum I named."

"Señor, this is glorious, and we'll do as you say; but if we are discovered the colonel will off with our heads."

"You cannot be found out, for the schooner will sail at once."

"When they return?"

"Take my word for it that they will not return."

"Well, señor, somehow I trust you, and more, I don't want to see you die, nor does Juan, and we wish we could save you."

"I'll take care of myself, my good fellows, if you take me on board the larger of the two schooners, and someday we may meet again and I won't forget your kindness; but here we are at the landing, so send the driver back with the *volante* and mind you, do not fail me."

"There lies the larger schooner so you can make no mistake; but halt here a moment while I write a letter which I wish you to deliver for me, to Jacobs the Jew," and by the light that shone from the window near by, Del Monte hastily wrote a few lines, and gave it to Pedro, who said:

"We'll do right by you, señor, never fear."

Then the two men led their prisoner to the shore, where a boat was in waiting.

"Ho, lads, who have you there?" called out a hearty voice as they approached.

Pedro explained his orders, and the seaman said:

"There comes our officer now, and we are waiting to take him on board."

The Mexican officer now approached, and the seaman explained what Pedro had said.

"Ay, ay, boatswain, take him on board, and stow him in the hold, and we'll get under way at once, as Colonel Rublo orders us; but I thought he was to come on board first."

"No, Señor Lieutenant, the Señor Colonel cannot come aboard to-night, and sent the orders I have said," answered Pedro.

"All right, I am glad enough to get off without further delay; but you wish my receipt for the prisoner?"

"Yes, señor."

By the light of a ship's lantern the Mexican officer wrote a receipt for the prisoner, signed his name and handed it to Pedro, after which he sprang into the boat, which pulled rapidly out to the schooner.

The two soldiers saw the boat hauled up to the davits, then some signals passed between the large schooner and the smaller one, and almost immediately the two vessels spread their snowy sails and stood seaward.

"Well, Juan, now we are to go back and tell a lie, and we are richer men than we ever dreamed we'd be," said Pedro.

"Fact, comrade," answered Juan, and half an hour after they entered they room of Colonel Rublo, just as he was growing very nervous about their long stay.

"Well, what word?" he cried, eagerly.

"Here's the lieutenant's receipt, Señor Colonel," said Pedro.

"What! this is the receipt of Mendez, of the larger schooner?"

"Yes, señor, it was to the largest schooner the old pilot told us to take the prisoner, as he had decided to go on that craft."

"Ah! that is all right then; but I will discover why he made the change when I go down after midnight to see him set sail."

"And, Señor Colonel," said Pedro hastily: "The pilot told me to say that the schooner had to set sail at once, señor—"

"What! must they go before midnight? Then I will at once go down and see them set sail."

"They are gone, Señor Colonel."

"Gone!"

"Yes, señor, the old pilot said you would un-

derstand their not being able to wait to see you."

"Oh, yes, it is all right, and they were ready to weigh anchor, only I did not expect them to do so before midnight."

"You may go now, men."

"But, señor, our reward?" cried Pedro.

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten about the thousand pesos reward."

"You promised us more, Señor Colonel, you remember."

"Certainly; there were two of you, and it was a thousand each."

"There were five of us, you remember, Señor Colonel?" gasped Pedro, while Juan turned white with dread that the officer would fail to recall the five-thousand-peso promise.

"Yes, I am glad you reminded me," said the colonel, with a sickly smile, for it hurt him to pay out gold, and he counted out the money, which the men eagerly seized and then hastily departed.

"Which way now, Pedro?"

"To the shop of Jacobs the Jew," was the answer, and the two soldiers set off on their errand to deliver Del Monte's letter.

CHAPTER XXXVII. THE LETTER.

THE two soldiers, feeling richer far than ever they had hoped to be, made their way toward the street in which lived Jacobs the Jew.

They went briskly along, until they turned into the deserted street on which was located the Haunted Citadel.

As I have before made known, the street, after getting a square from the busy thoroughfare, was deserted, for upon one side was a graveyard, occupying several hundred feet, and upon the other the walled-in grounds of the old man, known as the Haunted Citadel at one time, and with the history of which the reader is acquainted.

The old structure, since the living there of Señor Jacobs, had gradually drifted into the name of the Jew's Castle.

Having dropped the busy thoroughfare behind them, the two soldiers went more slowly.

In the distance glimmered the solitary lamp that swung over the Jew's shop door, and upon it the eyes of the pair were fixed.

All about them was dark and gloomy.

The graveyard upon one side, with the headstones looking like a regiment of ghosts in the darkness, the walled grounds of the Jew's Castle upon the other.

"What was that, Juan?" asked Pedro, stopping suddenly as he detected some slight sound.

"Nothing, good Pedro," was the answer, the expression being father to the hope that it was nothing.

Both men were scared, thoroughly so, and they showed it, but each one tried to make believe that he was indifferent to any danger that they might have to face them.

"I say, Pedro, I don't think we will find the Jew in his castle to-night," said Juan.

"Yes; for his light burns, and that is a sign his shop is open."

"You are not afraid, Juan?"

"Oh, no; what is there to be afraid of, Pedro?"

"Nothing."

With this assurance they went on their way, but suddenly they heard, or fancied they did, which was just the same, a sound in the graveyard, and with one accord they bounded forward, like the wind and sped for the lamp swinging above the Jew's door.

If one was fleetest than the other, he did not show it, for they kept side by side until they drew up breathless at the door of the money-lender's shop.

Israel sat within, and he heard the clattering feet, so sprung to the door, expecting to see a ghost in pursuit of some one.

As he opened the door the worthy pair of frightened soldiers darted in to the shop.

Israel sprung for his gun, but they threw up their hands and cried in chorus:

"We mean you no harm, señor!"

"What has frightened you, señores?"

Each looked at the other.

Neither knew, so the question remained unanswered.

"We came in a hurry, as we had business with the Señor Jacobs, and wished to get back to barracks before bedtime," said Pedro.

"Do you want money?"

"Oh, no, señor, but we have a letter."

"For whom?"

"The Señor Jacobs."

"Who sent it?"

"A señor who told us to deliver it in person, and it is very important."

"I will call the Señor Jacobs."

And Israel did so, when Pedro handed him the letter of Del Monte.

The Jew glanced at it, started, and said:

"You have done me a favor, my friends."

"Israel, give each of these men a hundred pesos."

Israel obeyed, and the valiant solidiers gave thanks and looked anxiously toward the door.

Israel then allowed them exit, and with one mind, they bounded away, nor did they stop in

their wild race from imaginary ghosts until they reached the inhabited street where were going to and fro their fellow-men.

The Jew in the mean time took the paper sent him by Del Monte and ascended to his sitting-room, where Adinah was idly drumming upon her harp.

She looked up quietly as her father entered, and said, in a disappointed tone:

"I thought that it was the Señor Del Monte."

"No, my child; I am sorry to say that he cannot come; but I have a letter from him here in cipher, and merely glanced at it to discover that he was detained, and now will read it."

The Jew then read in a slow, distinct voice the cipher letter, which was as follows:

"MY ESTEEMED BENEFACTOR:—

"I write you but a few lines to explain that I am in the hands of the Philistines."

"I dropped to sleep, the loss of rest I have undergone having worn me out, and my disguise was discovered and I was captured, taken before Colonel Rublo, and at once sent by him on board one of the schooners that are to sail to-night."

"He ordered me to be put in irons in the hold of the one which the old pilot was to go on, and I am confident, intended that I should be put to death when at sea."

"I have penetrated the disguise of the old pilot, and he is none other than El Moro, the Corsair Commodore, and you may know from what I have told you what my fate would be did I fall into his hands."

"I bribed my captors, however, to take me to the larger of the two schooners, and this they promise to do, as well as to return and tell the colonel that the old pilot sent him word that he had to sail at once and would explain when he saw him."

"Knowing that the colonel intended to run down at midnight and go as far as the San Juan de Uloa in the schooner on which was the old pilot, I caused my captors to tell the officer of the schooner that Colonel Rublo sent him orders to at once get under way."

"Then they were to return to the chief and give him the message as from the old pilot."

"As I go on board the larger schooner, you need not fear for me."

"I shall make myself known to the boatswain, who, as you know, is in my pay, and all will go well I trust."

"Should no hitch follow, you may expect to hear of me in command of the beautiful vessel before three days, and I shall run to the point where you are to have my crew in waiting, and then for a life upon the blue waters!"

"I write this in the cipher which we fortunately agreed upon, and if the two soldiers bring you this letter you may understand that all is right and the schooners have sailed."

"With the hope that you will not be disappointed in my career, believe me,

"Your attached friend,

"DEL MONTE."

"Then he has gone?" said Adinah, in a quivering voice, while her eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, my child, he has gone, and ere long we shall hear of him upon the sea."

"And he sent no word to me?"

"Ah, yes; here is something more."

And the Jew read:

"My remembrances to the Senorita Adinah, and a farewell, thanking her that she was so kind to a poor stranger who had crossed her path."

"As my career will keep me upon the sea now, and we may not meet again, give to her my kind wishes for her happiness along with a farewell that may be the last one."

"Once more, señor, adios."

"DEL MONTE."

With the last words Adinah burst into tears, and rising, the Jew approached her.

"My child, let me urge you not to allow your heart to control your head, for I know well the history of the Senor Del Monte, from his own lips, and I tell you that he is a man that can know but one love in life."

"That love he has felt, and did he live to old age, he could be won by no other woman, for, like myself, he could give his heart to but one, and his hand would never go without his love."

"I have observed that you are allowing your heart free rein, where the Senor Del Monte is concerned, and I now beg you to put a bridle upon your affections, and not lay up for the future the sorrow of unrequited love."

"Father, I am your child, and I will not seek the love of one whose heart is given to another."

"I will crush out this budding love in my heart, and call it friendship for the Senor Del Monte, and friendship only," and Adinah drew herself up proudly, and showed that she held power over herself to subdue a passion that would bring her only misery as an inheritance."

Anxious about the sailing of the schooners, Jacobs, the Jew, dispatched Israel to the shore, and in an hour's time he returned with the report that the two vessels had certainly left their anchorage and gone to sea."

"Then we may expect him to flaunt his flag to the breeze ere long, and woe be unto his foes," said the Jew, excitedly, and his face showed that he rejoiced in the fact that Del Monte would be soon in a position to dictate terms to his enemies."

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE TWO SCHOONERS.

WHEN Del Monte was taken on board the schooner, he was, according to orders, taken into the hold and made fast to a ringbolt, so that all possibility of escape was cut off.

A sailor, he soon discovered that the schooner was under way, and he knew that ere long his fate would be settled one way or the other.

Knowing the uselessness of fretting, Del Monte settled himself as comfortably as his chains would permit, and as soon as he felt the schooner rocking upon the billows of the ocean, he dropped off to sleep.

"Here, old man, do you think more of sleeping than eating?"

Del Monte started, awaking from a sound sleep, and found a sailor, with a tray of food, standing by his side.

It was light enough, for the hatch was open, to see that the one before him was one of the schooner's crew, and the sunlight visible above showed that he had slept through the night.

"No, my man, I will take my breakfast, which you have kindly brought me," he answered, politely.

"Might as well, for it's about the only pleasure you'll have up to the time of your death."

"Am I to be kept a prisoner for life?"

"Yes, old man, and from what I hear you are not to be a prisoner long."

"That means that I am to be killed?"

"Yes, señor."

"For what crime?"

"I do not know; but it came from the lieutenant, I hear, that you were to be gotten rid of."

"Where is the schooner now?"

"Some fifteen leagues out from Vera Cruz, and with no land in sight."

"Whither bound?"

"Don't know."

"Who is in command?"

"The lieutenant the colonel put in charge."

"And the other schooner?"

"Is leading us a quarter of a mile."

"I thought this schooner was said to be the fleetest of the two."

"So she is, for she is under jib and single-reefed foresail and mainsail, to keep astern, while the other has up topsails and no reefs, and even then only holds her own."

"And you have no idea of where the craft is bound?"

"They whisper in the fore-castle that the colonel sent 'em on a secret cruise."

"But where?"

"To pick up a crew waiting them on the coast somewhere, and then to head for the stronghold of the lagoon pirates."

"El Moro, the Corsair Commodore's stronghold, you mean?"

"Yes, señor."

"Who is your boatswain, my man?"

"A man every bit of him, señor."

"His name?"

"Boatswain Brail."

"Will you tell him that I would like to see him?"

"I'll tell him, señor, but I don't believe that he'll come, for I'm ordered to bring grub to you, and no one else is to come near you."

"Here, take this as a reminder that I would like to see the boatswain," and Del Monte slipped a golden *onza* into the seaman's hand.

"Whew! I'd never suspected to strike a gold mine in you, old man, and I guess the charge against you is piracy, as you seem to have many of the kin of this piece you gave me."

"I'll tell the bo'sen, señor, and now I'll go, as you have finished your breakfast, and eaten with an appetite, too, if you are in chains, and your neck is in a noose," and the talkative seaman departed from the hold, leaving the prisoner once more alone.

It was not long before a man's form was discerned darkening the hatchway, and as the one who had descended approached, Del Monte saw that it was Boatswain Brail.

"Well, old shipmate, is it you I find here?" cried the boatswain, in amazement, as his eyes fell upon the old sailor, with whom he had held several conversations ashore, and who had been so generous to him.

"Yes, boatswain, I'm the acquaintance you met at Vera Cruz," answered Del Monte.

"And here I was, wondering what had become of you, and had to tell all the boys that you got left, from our sailing some hours sooner than we expected to raise anchor."

"Yes, but I managed to get aboard, though in a little different manner from what I expected."

"I heard a prisoner had been brought on board, for my mate, who was acting boatswain while I was ashore for a while, told me so."

"I just managed to get off myself, owing to the schooner's getting off sooner than we thought."

"But I never thought you was the prisoner, señor, and just tell me how it so happens that you are?"

In a few words Del Monte told of his capture by the soldiers, and being taken before Colonel Rublo, and then ordered on board of the schooner, word having been sent by the Secret Service chief to the old pilot.

"Can it be, señor, that you are the man the Secret Service hounds have been so hotly trailing by Colonel Rublo's orders?" asked the boatswain.

"I am the one, boatswain," was the reply.

"Well, they tell great stories of you, and I have heard how you disarmed the colonel, who is the pride of the Lancers as a swordsman, and only with your knife, when he attacked you in the Montezuma Palace.

"Then they say you have a giant's strength, and got out of the prison most cleverly.

"You see I have heard the officers chatting in the cabin, for I keep within earshot, being of an inquiring mind.

"Now I know what I suspected, that you are sailing under false colors, and that those gray locks and the white beard didn't grow where they are," and, as the boatswain spoke he gazed upon the prisoner with admiration.

Raising his manacled hands Del Monte removed his disguise, and an exclamation of pleased admiration broke from the lips of the boatswain, as he gazed upon the fearless, handsome face.

"Aha! and you are the one, señor, they whisper about the ship are to be thrown overboard when we are well out in the blue water?"

"That was to be my fate then, was it?" coolly asked Del Monte, replacing his disguise.

"Yes, señor, so I heard the lieutenant tell a middy, had been his orders, for he called you a dangerous pirate chief."

"Indeed? Well, we shall see; but now, boatswain, what have you done toward getting the men over?"

"All will go as I say, señor, excepting a coxswain I dare not speak to, and of course the lieutenant and a middy."

"That is good, and we'll act when the leading schooner runs inshore, whether it be to-night or in the morning."

"She has headed for land now, señor, and they say she is to pick up a crew at a certain point."

"That is the story; but when the leading vessel gets within a mile of the land, come and call me and I will go on deck and take command."

"Yes, señor."

"And if the schooner ahead should lay to, as though to send a boat aboard, call me, for I must be in command to thwart what the old pilot on the other craft may attempt."

"I'll do so, señor."

"Go on deck now and get the men well in hand; here is money for you, to back up your words to them, but let the officers not suspect anything."

"No, señor, all shall be kept still, I assure you."

"Stay, take this key from my coat collar and unlock my manacles."

The boatswain drew out of its hiding-place an ingeniously-formed key, and, following the directions of Del Monte, soon had the irons on his wrists and ankles unlocked.

"During the day, boatswain, bring me down a sword and pair of pistols, if you please."

"I will, señor," and the seaman went on deck.

Several hours thus passed and the boatswain reappeared bearing a bundle.

"Señor, here is a cutlass and a pair of pistols for you."

"Several of the men may prove treacherous, but we can master them, once you have the lieutenant and middy in your power."

"The former is now in the cabin, and the latter holds the deck."

"We are nearing the land, and the leading schooner is not a quarter of a mile distant, and heading for a lagoon."

"Very well, I will pass into the cabin by the ward-room gangway and make the Mexican officer prisoner."

"Then I will appear on deck, and you be ready to act."

"Yes, señor," and the boatswain hurried back to the deck, while Del Monte arose, shook himself as an angry lion might before engaging in combat, and then threw off his disguise.

Taking up the pistols he thrust them into his belt, and seizing the cutlass he felt its edge with the cool manner of a man who meant to use it in a death-struggle and wished to know that it could be depended on.

"Now I am ready, and first the Mexican lieutenant is my game," he said, as he made his way to the berth-deck and thence to the gangway leading into the cabin of the schooner.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CHANGE OF MASTERS.

THE gangway leading from the wardroom of the schooner on which Del Monte, the mysterious stranger, was a prisoner, was a narrow one.

The man who was intending such a bold move to get possession of the vessel which he knew was sailing directly into the clutches of El Moro, the Corsair Commodore, passed along the berth-deck unseen.

Brail, the boatswain, had taken particular care that every man whom he had any power over on board the vessel should be on deck, so that there was not a soul below, excepting the Mexican lieutenant in charge, and he was in the cabin, just where the conspirators wished him to be just at that time.

The Mexican sat at the table, studying a

chart of the coast, and making certain marks here and there.

Little he dreamed that Colonel Christo Rublo, the man who sent him out in command of the vessel, was sending him into a trap.

He knew that the vessels were purchased and fitted out to go against El Moro, at least so he believed, and he had faith in the Mexican chief of the secret service, and was studying the coast in the vicinity of the Corsair Commodore's stronghold, not one thought in his brain that the supposed old pilot on the smaller schooner was none other than the pirate leader himself.

"Señor, you are my prisoner, and a loud word will sound your death-knell."

The words were distinct, and in earnest, and the Mexican attempted to start to his feet, when an iron hand upon his shoulder pressed him back into his seat.

Over his shoulder he glanced to behold the tall form of Del Monte towering above him, and a pistol muzzle close to his temple.

"*Madre de Dios!* who are you?" he gasped.

"Your captor, señor, but one who means you no harm."

"What do you here on board this vessel?"

"I came on board, señor, to capture the craft, and I have begun by making you my prisoner."

"You are wholly in my power, and it will be well for you to submit, rather than force me to kill you—your hands, please, for these irons."

There was that in Del Monte's face and calm manner that cowed the Mexican officer, and he held forth his hands submissively and allowed the irons to be clasped upon his wrists.

"Now, señor, I must chain you to this ring-bolt for awhile, and yet I will not keep you longer than necessary."

A chain was made fast to the manacles, and then locked to the ring-bolt, and with a bow Del Monte went on deck.

He stepped out of the companionway to find two men at the wheel, and confronting them quickly, said sternly:

"Men, do you serve Mexico, or me, for I am the friend of boatswain Brail?"

"You, señor, and gladly," was the answer of one, while the other said:

"The bo'sen has told us of you, cap'n."

"All right, lads, keep your post at the wheel," and walking quickly forward to where a Mexican midshipman was leaning over the side, gazing shoreward, he said:

"Señor, you are a prisoner, so accept the situation, for resistance is useless."

"Ha! treachery! men, all to the rescue!" cried the middy.

But his sword was struck from his hand, and he was seized in a grasp he could not shake off, and manacles were slipped upon his wrists in a twinkling, while in trumpet tones Del Monte cried:

"Ho, lads! who serves me instead of Mexico?"

A score of voices answered with a cheer, while two who did not join in the cry were quickly seized and bound.

"All safe aboard, Señor Captain," cried Boatswain Brail.

"Ay, ay, sir; come aft and act as my lieutenant, and let the schooner hold on as she is for the present," was the order of Del Monte, and he took up a glass and turned it upon the craft ahead, and from that to the shores which they were approaching.

The two seamen and the middy were now taken into the cabin, where they found their lieutenant also in irons, and as the sun was near its setting, Del Monte cried:

"Señor Brail, change the schooner's course, putting her seaward, for there is no need of following longer in the wake of yonder craft, if we do not want our pretty vessel to form one of the Corsair Commodore's fleet."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the ready answer, and at his command the men sprung with alacrity to obey, and the schooner's course was at once changed.

This change was immediately observed from the deck of the smaller schooner, and almost instantly a signal was given asking the cause.

But the captured schooner returned no response, and a peremptory signal was set.

This also remained unanswered and the schooner was seen to luff sharp, and as she wore around a gun was fired from her bows, the shot flying ahead of the captured craft.

Still no response was returned, and the next thing the surprised commander of the smaller vessel did was to order extra sail set and to start in full chase.

Del Monte at this ordered the reefs shaken out from his canvas, and the swift vessel immediately began to gain on her pursuer.

Realizing this, and that she could never overtake her swifter companion, the smaller schooner luffed sharp and sent a broadside after her, but which, however, did no damage, the shots flying wild.

And into the darkness, for the sun had gone down, the kidnapped schooner sailed away, while its sister craft stood on its course once more, and held in toward the land.

Upon her deck, besides the crew, stood the Mexican lieutenant in command, a midshipman, and the pilot, the latter being at the wheel.

The strange act of the other vessel had

astounded all on board, and not one could solve the mystery.

The old pilot was almost wild with fury, and uttered oaths both loud and deep, until the Mexican lieutenant said:

"Old man, you take advantage of your gray hairs, and forget that you are upon the quarter-deck."

"Keep silent, sir, for you appear to take the loss of the schooner more to heart than any one else, when all that your duty consisted in was piloting us to the rendezvous where we are to meet our crews."

El Moro saw that he had made a mistake, and well-nigh betrayed himself, so he kept quiet, for he felt that he was alone on board the schooner, as the pirates who had been shipped as part of the crew had in some strange way gotten on board the other vessel.

He had an idea that his pirate crew had mutinied and run off with the other vessel; but who was to be their chief, or what they were to do, with no leader, and only about twenty men on board, he could not comprehend.

But at the hint of the Mexican lieutenant he allowed his anger to cool, and taking the wheel once more headed for the mouth of the lagoon now seen opening before them.

It was night, and the coast was a dangerous one, so that the Mexican commander was anxious, for he wished to take his vessel in safety to the rendezvous, especially as the other schooner had been lost.

"You are sure you know your way?" Señor Pilot? he asked several times as they neared the shore.

"I know the channels well, señor," was the answer.

"And there is no doubt about this being the point of rendezvous?"

"None, señor; we will have the boats coming on board soon, for they have seen us without doubt."

"Will you give the signal?"

The lieutenant nodded and called to a seaman to bring a red lantern.

When the order was obeyed, he swung it thrice around his head, and then all eyes were turned upon the dark, heavily-wooded shores.

Then, from out the gloom came a circle of red light, until five times a lantern had seemingly been swung around a man's head.

Again the lieutenant seized the lantern, and this time whirled it in a circle an equal number of times with the light just shown.

The answer from the shore followed with three turns, and the disguised pirate quickly said:

"The signals are exact, señor, according to what the colonel said."

"Yes; they have evidently had their eyes upon us, but made us no sign, on account of one schooner coming instead of two."

"I will signal now for the boats to come off, for I do not like running into this lagoon any further."

As he spoke, he fired a pistol into the air, and immediately came a like response from the shore.

"Luff sharp, pilot, and lay to," ordered the Mexican officer, and the pirate obeyed.

A few moments had the schooner been lying at rest upon the waters, when the steady stroke of oars was heard, and soon several boats, crowded with men, shot out from the shadow of the shore, and a short while after were within easy hail.

"Ho, those boats, ahoy!" called out the Mexican.

"Ay, ay, señor; we are the crews for the schooners," answered a deep voice, and a moment after the boats ran alongside.

As the men poured over the schooner's side like a swarm of locusts, the pirate hailed:

"Ho! Duluth, is that you?"

"No, señor; it is Lulu, the Lioness! Are we to fight for the schooner?" came the ready answer, and in the ringing, silvery voice of Lady Lulu.

"Stand ready to obey orders!" now rung out in the deep tones of the supposed pilot, and throwing aside his disguise, he turned upon the amazed lieutenant and continued:

"Señor Mexican, you and your crew are the prisoners of El Moro, the Corsair Commodore!"

A pistol was leveled at the heart of the amazed Mexican lieutenant, and he started back, his hand upon his sword-hilt, while he gasped forth:

"*Madre de Dios!* what does this mean?"

"It means, señor, that I learned of the plot to send this schooner and the one that escaped me to attack my stronghold, and I played a deep game to capture them and add them to my fleet."

"Your life, and the lives of your men, who I see are too frightened to resist, are safe, and I will give you boats in which to return along the coast to Vera Cruz, for this vessel is my prize."

"And you are El Moro, the outlaw, whom men call the Corsair Commodore?" cried the Mexican lieutenant.

"I am, señor, and this is my daughter, Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon, of whom you have also doubtless heard," and the pirate turned to Lulu, who just then came up and joined her father where he stood on the quarter-deck with the lieutenant and midshipman.

The officers both bowed, as their eyes fell upon the beautiful girl, while the lieutenant said:

"And you are the pirate queen, señorita, known as Lady Lulu, the Lioness, and I find you at the head of this boarding party of buccaneers?"

"Yes, señor, for having aided my father in the plot to add to our fleet, I decided to lead the crews intended for the two vessels," was the quiet response, while, turning to El Moro, Lady Lulu continued:

"Father, what has become of the other vessel, and which was the best of the two?"

"It mysteriously put about and fled from us this afternoon, my daughter, and I think there was a change of masters on her, too."

"But who?"

"That I do not know; but as a part of her crew were our men, they may have mutinied and taken the vessel for their own use."

"The traitors! we will have to put the Winged Tigress on their wake and run them down," said Lady Lulu, angrily.

"That is just what I shall do, Lulu; but how came you up from the stronghold?"

"I came here in my *goleta* from Vera Cruz, knowing your rendezvous, and have not returned to the stronghold yet."

"Ah! then we return together, for there is much that I have to talk with you about; but now let me get these officers and their men off," and having stored two boats that had sails, El Moro ordered the Mexicans into them, and they sailed away toward Vera Cruz, the Corsair Commodore calling after them:

"Señor, present my compliments to Colonel Rublo of the Secret Service, and tell him that El Moro thanks the Government through him for this fine vessel, and is ready to take charge of any others that may be fitted out to attack him."

"Caramba! you'll yet come to the end of the rope about your neck, Sir Pirate, for Colonel Rublo is no man to allow even El Moro, the Corsair, to get the best of him," shouted back the Mexican lieutenant, and his words were answered by mocking laughter, in which the silvery voice of Lady Lulu joined.

CHAPTER XL.

A WOMAN'S SECRET.

WHEN Lady Lulu sailed from Vera Cruz she set out for the stronghold, but understanding thoroughly the plot of Colonel Rublo, to turn the schooners over to her father, she headed for the rendezvous on the coast, where they were to fall into the hands of the pirates lying in wait.

She sailed into the lagoon in the daylight, and Duluth, who was in charge of the force that had come from the stronghold, recognized the *goleta* and rushed out to meet her.

He had run down from the stronghold in the Winged Tigress, with over a hundred men on board beyond her crew, and who were intended for the two schooners.

They had gone into camp on the banks of the lagoon, and the pretty brig was in hiding not far distant.

When the Mexican officers and their crew had departed in their two boats, to return to Vera Cruz, El Moro had ordered the schooner run into the hiding-place of the brig, and while Duluth was dividing the crews between the two vessels the pirate chief sought the cabin of the Winged Tigress, bidding his daughter accompany him.

Lady Lulu seemed to anticipate that her father expected certain explanations from her; but she seemed utterly unmoved, and threw herself into an easy-chair while she said:

"I congratulate you, father, upon the expedition against us having been broken up, and also the securing of so fine a vessel to our fleet, though I regret the other schooner escaped you."

"Yes, she has escaped for the present, I admit; but I shall go at once in chase of her with both this brig and the schooner, and woe be unto those who have stolen her from me."

"Do you suspect any of your men, señor?"

"No, though there was a smart boatswain on board that might have taken the lead, and he is doubtless the kidnapper, though what he can do with little over half a score of men I cannot see, as there were Mexicans on board who certainly would not join him."

"He is doubtless the man, father; but I wish he had not taken the best of the schooners."

"That was my fault, in a way, for I came on board the smaller one as pilot, as I expected to run into the lagoon by night, you know, and the other schooner drew too much water to come in, as she is deeper than the brig even, and I expected, after getting possession of my craft, to carry out the crew of the other one and seize her outside."

"Thus it was, Lulu, that they got the best vessel from me."

"Well, señor, I hope you may retake her."

"I intend to do so, for she cannot escape me, and the brig can catch her, I am confident, though she sails like a witch, and had to single reef all around to keep from running by and taking the lead."

"But, Lulu, there is something else I wish to speak to you about."

"Well, father?"

"You remained quite a while in Vera Cruz."

"Yes, longer than I anticipated I would."

"You saw Colonel Rublo?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"And he gave a release to one of your crew, who had been arrested and thrown into prison?"

"Yes, father, he was kind enough to do so."

"May I ask if it was Zuma, your peon sailing-master?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You say it was Zuma?"

"Oh no, father, I said you might ask if it was Zuma."

"Ah! then it was not Zuma?"

"No, señor."

"Who was it, then?"

"A man, father."

"Of course; but what man?"

"That is a secret of my own, señor."

"Do you mean that you do not intend to tell me?"

"I do, father."

"Lulu!"

"Father!"

El Moro was angry and he looked it, for he almost glared upon his daughter.

As for Lady Lulu, she was calm as a May morn.

"You will not tell me?"

"No, father, for it is a secret I intend to keep to myself for the present."

"By Heaven! but I will wring the truth from your peon crew."

"They will not tell, father."

"They shall, for if they do not I shall kill them."

"If they do I shall kill them; but in truth they do not know."

"What! they do not know who this man was?"

"No, señor."

"And yet he was on board your *goleta* with you?"

"Who says so?"

"Was he not?"

"He came on board as I set sail to bid me farewell."

"Ah! then the peons do not know, for he was some one you know in Vera Cruz."

"Yes, father, he is in Vera Cruz."

El Moro was silent a moment, and then he said:

"Lulu, a priest left the lagoon stronghold with you in the *goleta*?"

"Yes, father."

"Was it he?"

"A priest?"

"Yes."

"No, sir, it was not."

"Where is that padre?"

"I hailed an outward-bound vessel, a packet ship for the United States, and put him on board, as he did not care to go into Vera Cruz."

"Is this true?"

"Zuma, his crew, and Zuza, my maid, can tell you so, father."

"Yet they cannot tell of this man about whom there is such a mystery?"

"No, señor, they know nothing of him."

"Lulu, have you given up your idea of becoming the wife of Colonel Rublo?"

"Oh, no, father."

"You will marry him then?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"I do wish it, but what will he say to his having a rival for your love?"

"He has no rival for my love."

"This stranger?"

"No stranger loves me, any more than I love Colonel Rublo, whom I am willing to marry for the good of the band, and, in the end, get out of this life of outlawry I lead."

"I know Colonel Rublo to be a traitor to his Government, and our friend for gold alone, and I am willing to pay him well to keep the rope from about your neck, though I hate rather than love him."

"You are frank enough at any rate."

"I am honest, father, and I intend to be with him, for he shall know that I wed him for protection to our band, and not for love."

"A few days ago I felt that I would not marry him; but I have since changed my mind."

"You reared me as a lady, and then allowed me to know just what my father was, and it has made me what I am."

"Did I love a man, and he were honest and true, I could go far from here and be happy with him; but it is not for me now to talk of love or aught else, though, as Colonel Rublo's wife, in the gay city of Mexico, I may be able to drown thought, and feel that I am protecting my pirate father from the yard-arm."

"My child, it pains me to hear you speak so."

"Oh, do not feel sorrow on my account, father; but go on with your red work of piracy until you are satiated with blood-shedding and gold-getting, or end your days at the yard-arm, for sooner or later one or the other must come."

"Bah! don't be a fool, Lulu, and prognosticate evil."

"I am not a fool, father; if my sensibilities were less keen I would be the happier."

"And you still refuse to tell me about this mysterious man you met in Vera Cruz?"

"I do, father."

El Moro sprung to his feet and paced to and fro in anger, now and then glancing at Lady Lulu, who sat pale and sad-faced, but as firm as a rock.

"I will get the secret from you in some way, girl."

"Father, don't threaten for I am too thoroughly your child for you to attempt to frighten me, or force from me that which I have made up my mind I would keep as a dead secret."

El Moro looked at her an instant, and seeming to realize fully how thoroughly she was like himself, he said:

"I believe you, Lulu, and I leave you to tell me in your own way and time that which I would know."

"Now I wish you to return to the stronghold in your *goleta*, and in a short time you may expect me to run in with the brig and both of the schooners, for I shall sail at once in chase of the runaway."

Bidding her father an affectionate farewell, Lady Lulu boarded the *goleta*, and soon after the three vessels stood out of the lagoon, the little craft heading for the stronghold, and the larger vessels on the search for the fugitive schooner.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE TIDINGS.

COLONEL RUBLO had a great weight taken off his mind when he found that the two schooners had sailed.

Of course he was anxious to learn of the success of his treacherous plot, but then he had hardly a doubt of its ending otherwise than as he had planned.

He wondered at the schooner's departing ahead of the time set, and the reason therefor; but he did not worry himself on this score, and went on with his duties with apparent contentment.

As soon as he heard of the capture of the vessels by the pirate commodore, he would at once start for Mexico City to break the news to the *junta* and ask that he might arrange to start another expedition, which he would not be allowed, as the Government was unable financially to do so, and had no vessels, and thus El Moro would have full sway for some time to come.

Seated in his rooms one afternoon, at peace with himself and the world in general, to judge from his face, Colonel Rublo was told by his servant that two officers desired to speak with him upon a most important matter.

The colonel had sent money enough to Mexico City, to his banker there, to pay off the mortgages upon his estates and his debts, and only a short while before, the courier had returned with the information that all was well.

Having no debts and a goodly surplus, with a letter from the *junta* in Mexico City, commending his alacrity and prowess in getting the vessels off on their mission, it was no wonder that Colonel Rublo was in a good humor.

He had no conscience, no heart, and thus it was that none of his evil deeds worried him.

"Show the señors in, Ponce," he said to the servant who had taken the place of the peon whom he had killed, and who was one of the same race, and nicknamed by the colonel Ponce, so that he would not have to worry himself to recall another name that he was not accustomed to.

The colonel sprung to his feet in feigned surprise as the lieutenant and midshipman of one of the schooners entered the room.

"Ha! you here? What does it mean, señor?"

"It means disaster, Colonel Rublo, for our schooner was captured, and I came on in my boats to this port, arriving but half an hour ago," and the lieutenant told the story of the run out, the strange sailing away of the other schooner, and how the pretended old pilot had proven to be El Moro, the Corsair, in disguise.

Colonel Rublo listened in real astonishment, for the action of the other schooner was a great surprise to him.

He questioned the officer over and over again, and then asked suddenly:

"But what became of the prisoner I sent on board just before sailing?"

"What prisoner, señor?"

"A man in irons whom I sent on board your schooner, sir."

"No prisoner came on board, Señor Colonel."

"Ah, yes, I remember, he was ordered to the other vessel, and that is the craft that has escaped."

"There is some strange mystery in all this, Señor Lieutenant."

"I hope you do not blame me, señor, for I of course trusted the pilot, as I supposed him to be, and the force that boarded us outnumbered my crew ten to one."

"No, I do not censure you, señor, for it was an affair which you could not prevent, and the truth is, this cunning pirate in some way found out our plot, and laid his plans to thwart us and gain his own ends— Well, peon, what is it?"

"The officer of the other schooner is here to see you, señor."

"Show him in, you idiot," shouted the colonel, and he added:

"Now we will get at the truth of the vessel's mysterious flight."

The next instant he walked the lieutenant who had commanded the larger of the two schooners. He started with surprise at seeing his brother officer of the other vessel there, and asked:

"What, Henrique, has harm befallen your vessel too?"

"Yes, señor, I have just heard of the capture of the smaller schooner by El Moro, the Corsair Commodore, and of the flight of your vessel in a most mysterious way, so I would like an explanation from you," sternly said Colonel Rublo.

"Señor Chief, you sent on board, at the last moment before sailing, a prisoner?"

"I did! what of him?"

"Your soldiers gave me orders to sail at once, as it would be impossible to come on board as you had intended doing."

"By the Aztec Eagle! I sent no such word," cried Colonel Rublo, in a fury.

"Your soldiers so stated when they brought the prisoner."

"I sent the prisoner on board the other schooner, and when your receipt came for him, the men told me that it was decided by the pilot to sail at once."

"We were given orders to sail at once, señor."

Colonel Rublo was in a towering rage, and dispatched a guard at once for the two soldiers, after which he turned to the officer of the larger vessel, and asked sternly:

"How is it that I find you here, señor?"

"My crew mutinied, the prisoner was released, and he made me prisoner, along with the midshipman and several of the crew who remained by me."

"We stood away seaward then, and hailing an incoming craft the next day we were put on board of her, and I landed but a short while ago, when I hurried here to make my report, Señor Colonel."

Colonel Rublo was speechless with rage and disappointment.

While pacing the room in anger, silent and stern, the officers gazing at him as they might at a furious, uncaged lion, the guard sent after the two soldiers returned.

"Well?" thundered the irate colonel.

"The men deserted, señor, some days ago."

Colonel Rublo became livid, but before he could speak a naval officer was ushered into the room.

He looked ill and walked with difficulty.

The chief recognized him as one who had been with the force sent to the coast, nominally to await the schooners, but in reality as a blind.

"Well, Ceres, why are you here?" he asked, and the officer sunk into a chair.

"Señor Colonel, I was taken so ill that Captain Valdez thought that I had better not go with the schooner, so some peon fishermen brought me here."

"You have missed nothing, Ceres, for these gentlemen were in command of the schooners and lost them to El Moro, the Corsair and a young friend of his, who, I expect, will also turn pirate."

"Indeed! Señor Colonel, but one of the schooners came."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, señor; it ran in, signaled us, and the crew went off, while I came on here."

"By the Sun-god of Mexico! but this mysterious plot deepens."

"Ha! I have it. That prisoner has in some way trapped the crews, or El Moro has done so; but I am not to be made a fool of, as they shall find."

"Señors, I go to Mexico City at once, and you hold yourselves here in readiness for my orders, for I shall return at the earliest moment, and if the *junta* will not send an armed vessel out to retake those schooners, I will buy one of these fleet American vessels that come into our port and fit her out at my own expense to hunt down those who have made us play into their hands."

Half an hour after Colonel Rublo was riding rapidly toward the City of Mexico, his escort of lanceros having to use the spur freely to keep up with him; but it was not El Moro whom he meant to arm a vessel to hunt down, as the reader may well imagine, but Del Monte, the mysterious stranger, who had so cleverly outwitted him and escaped from his clutches.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE BRITISH TROOP SHIP.

SEVERAL weeks after the incidents related in the foregoing chapter, a large clipper ship was sailing slowly along the north coast of Yucatan.

Her appearance indicated that she had suffered by both storm and chase, for her topmasts were gone, though her crew were hard at work preparing new spars to go aloft, and her hull and rigging were scarred by shot-marks.

The wind was not strong, and she was moving slowly along on an easterly course, as though she meant to make the Island of Jamaica, for the English flag was flying at her peak.

Upon her quarter-deck were a score of persons, persons half a dozen of whom were ladies, the remainder being men in the brilliant uniform of English officers.

Amidships were pacing other officers, of a

lower grade than those on the quarter-deck, and forward were several hundred soldiers.

The vessel was a king's troop ship, and it had been long on its voyage from the Canadas to the West Indies.

Jamaica had been its port of destination, and with two sister ships, also bearing troops, it had been under the convoy of a line-of-battle ship, which had boldly stood at bay when off the Florida coast, to give battle to two Spanish men-of-war they had run upon in the early dawn, while her comparatively helpless fleet should escape.

A severe storm breaking soon after, the vessel now presented to the reader, had been separated from the rest of her consorts, and her commander had put her before the gale which had driven her far out of her course.

Hardly had pleasant weather come again, and the good ship once more put on her course to round the western end of Cuba and head for Jamaica, when one of the fierce tornadoes of that latitude swept down upon her, and for a while it was thought she could not live out the gale, and again she had to fly before the fierce hurricane until she neared the coast of Yucatan, where she is first seen by the reader.

It is to some of the group gathered upon her quarter-deck that we now turn, for they will be found to be old acquaintances.

The fine-looking man of middle age, who reclines in an easy-chair, smoking a cigar, is Colonel Ainsworth, last seen commanding the British king's troops in far-away Sydney, at the time the convict craft had brought out to him his wife, daughter and nephew.

His wife, beautiful as ever, yet wearing a wearied look, as though longing to have her voyage ended, sits by his side engaged in embroidering, while their lovely daughter, Gulanare, is reading aloud to them, her handsome cousin, the young captain and *aide* to his uncle, being also seated near listening to the musical voice of the maiden as she reads.

The others upon the quarter-deck are the ranking officers of Colonel Ainsworth's command, with their wives and families, along with the captain of the troop ship and his lieutenants.

Colonel Ainsworth had been ordered, at his own request, to Canada, but, after the long voyage from the Antipodes, ere he could land there, he found that a cruiser had arrived with his promotion to the rank of general and a command from his king to at once sail for Jamaica, where he was to assume the position of Governor-Commandant of the island.

"Sail ho!" suddenly rung out from aloft, and it startled every soul on board ship.

There was no need to ask where the stranger was, for, out of an inlet on the coast suddenly shot into view a trim brig.

She came merrily along under the light breeze that was blowing, and her decks were seen to be crowded with men, and heavily armed.

"What is she, captain?" asked General Ainsworth, as the ship's captain finished issuing his orders to crowd on all sail in flight.

"A Spaniard, sir, evidently, as she is in their waters, though, now that I examine her closely, she looks strangely like a craft I have seen in other seas than these."

The last he said in a low tone, and he beckoned to the general to walk aside with him.

"Well, Captain Luther, what is she?" asked General Ainsworth.

"Do you remember a craft that did so much killing and robbing in Australian waters some half a year ago?"

"A pirate?" asked the general, quickly.

"Yes, sir, a craft known as the Winged Tigress, under command of a red-handed wretch who called himself El Moro."

"Do you mean that yonder is the craft, Luther?"

"Sure, for I can never be mistaken, as there are not two vessels afloat rigged and modeled as she is; besides you know she had disappeared from Australian waters before we left."

"Yes, she was captured by the convict ship that brought my family out, and which the young convict captain returned to me."

"But I trust you are wrong, Luther."

"I am right, general! Ah! there goes a gun, and up goes the Spanish flag."

The shot from the brig flew over the bows of the troop ship, and knowing the impossibility of escaping, General Ainsworth said:

"What can we do, Captain Luther?"

"She's too nimble for us, sir, and if we attempted to run could catch us."

"As for our crew, we have over three hundred men on board, and could eat him up did he board us; but he won't do that, but will lay off and sink us with his heavy guns while we are at his mercy."

"We can see if he will fire into us, and if he does, we can lay to and come to some terms, for if he is a pirate he certainly does not wish a troop ship as a prize."

"No, general; but see, he wishes us to show our flag," and as another shot was fired from the brig the Spanish flag was run up to the peak of the troop ship.

Instantly the brig luffed sharp and fired a broadside which left its mark upon several of the crew.

"Hoist our own flag, Luther," said the general, and up went the blood-red ensign of England.

This did not satisfy the commander of the brig, for he fired another broadside which did considerable damage.

"I'll lay to, sir, and parley with him, for it is all that we can do," and the troop ship, so formidable had the stranger boarded, so helpless at long range, was brought to.

Down swept the brig, with her crew at quarters, and coming nearer the Spanish flag was hauled down, and in its place up went the skull and cross-bones on the black field.

"Ho, that troop ship!" came across the waters.

"Ahoy the brig!" answered Captain Luther.

"You have arms and ammunition, just what I need, and I guess there's gold aboard as well as steel, so let your troops take to their boats and pull off to a safe distance, while I inspect your vessel."

Such was the order of El Moro, for he it was, and there was no alternative but to obey.

The boats were lowered and literally packed with soldiers, and then pulled slowly away from the ship, the women being left on board, along with a few soldiers.

Then the brig ran alongside of the troop ship, and El Moro sprung on her decks, followed by a hundred of his desperate men.

At once the work of robbery was begun, and so busy were the pirates in their work they failed to notice a vessel that was sweeping down upon them until suddenly a loud cry arose of

"Sail ho! sail ho!"

Springing upon the bulwark El Moro gazed at the stranger, and saw a large schooner running out from the shelter of the land, and crowding on under full sail.

"It is the fugitive schooner, as I live!"

"To your brig, lads, for there is the game we have so long sought in vain," and El Moro fairly shouted the words.

Instantly the crew rushed back to their brig, and springing on board cast off the grapnels.

As she swung clear of the ship a shot came from the schooner's bows and went tearing along the brig's deck, cutting down half a dozen pirates.

At the same time up to the peak of the schooner went a blue flag with the strange device in the center of a white hand grasping by the neck a red serpent, while about the wrist of the hand was a manacle and chain.

Afraid to attempt to pull back to their vessel, the boats, filled with soldiers were forced to lie still out upon the waters, while those on the troop ship gathered together to watch the combat, for they saw that the schooner meant to fight the brig notwithstanding she was her superior in guns and men, and fully a hundred tons heavier.

"Heaven grant the plucky schooner defeat the brig, for, Captain Luther, did you hear the threat of that pirate chief to take my daughter as a prize to hold for ransom?" said General Ainsworth.

"I heard it, sir, and I pray the schooner be not our foe too, for I do not know his flag and its smacks of outlawry," answered the captain of the troop ship, as he again bent his eyes upon the schooner dashing down to attack the brig.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AGAINST DESPERATE ODDS.

As all on board the troop ship watched with breathless interest the two vessels, rushing toward the conflict, they saw that the schooner reserved its fire, while there was a chance that her shot might fall among the boats or hit the large vessel.

"This proves her no foe to us," said General Ainsworth, and as he spoke the brig opened hotly upon the schooner.

But the latter soon returned the fire with terrible effect, and it was soon seen to be the intention of the schooner's commander to board his enemy.

This the brig tried to prevent, and scathed by the hot fire of her small adversary, she started to fly, when a broadside from the schooner cut away her bowsprit and she broached to.

A moment after the schooner boarded, and the yells of the combatants were fearful; but it was not very long before the men were seen throwing themselves into the sea, and then down from the peak of the brig was hauled the black flag.

A cheer broke from those in the troop ship as they beheld this, and was echoed from the boats, while immediately after a cry of alarm arose, as, out from the land, near which the brig and schooner had drawn during their combat, came another vessel.

It was a schooner, slightly smaller than the one that had just whipped the brig; but it bore a heavy armament, and her decks were literally packed with men.

At her peak floated the black flag, and she began to fire upon the other schooner as she approached.

"By the cross! Luther, signal the boats, and I will lead them to the aid of yonder plucky fellow, for see, he has cast off from the brig and goes to fight the other pirate," cried General Ainsworth.

While the boats were returning to the troop

ship, in answer to the signal recalling them, the two schooners had begun a desperate conflict.

But suddenly there were heard loud cries on the brig, and fierce fighting followed.

"Ha! the pirates have risen against the guard the schooner left over them, and see, they have regained the brig!" cried General Ainsworth.

The brig was now seen to rig hastily a bowsprit and run down to join once more in the combat; but the schooner that had captured her put about instantly, and again stood down toward her, once more boarding, and the fight on her decks was renewed.

A few moments after the other schooner ran alongside, and then fierce and terrible the conflict was waged, until General Ainsworth sprang into the first boat to arrive alongside the troop ship, and hastily arming his soldiers, gave orders to pull hard for the three vessels, at the same time telling Captain Luther and his nephew to follow in the next boats that arrived.

Hard and fast pulled the oarsmen; but ere they arrived in a cable's length of the three vessels, which seemed like an Inferno, the fighting suddenly ceased, the fierce tumult was hushed, and down came the pirate flags.

Wildly the soldiers cheered, and upon boarding the schooner that had fought against such desperate odds, General Ainsworth was met at the gangway by a tall, splendid-looking young man, his head bound up with a kerchief, his cutlass red to the hilt and his face besmeared with blood and powder.

"I thank you, sir, for coming to my aid; but it was not necessary, and you are at liberty to go on your way," said the young commander of the schooner.

"You have made the bravest fight, sir, man ever did, and I owe you my deepest gratitude," said the general, warmly, while just then his nephew, Captain Ainsworth, sprang on board.

"Great God! Neil Morgan, is this you?"

"Ay, it is, and no other, and once more we owe you our lives. General Ainsworth, this is Neil Morgan, the—the young man who saved us at the time of the mutiny on the convict ship."

"What! can it be possible, sir, that I owe you the favor of again saving those I love from falling into outlaw hands?"

"Mr. Morgan, you left England as a convict, but I'll not draw my sword for a king who would refuse to give you free pardon after the gallant services you have rendered," and General Ainsworth warmly grasped the hand of the young commander of the schooner, and whom the reader now knows to be none other than Neil Morgan, the convict.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DEATH-BLOW.

LADY LULU the Lioness stood in her little fort, at the pirate stronghold, gazing upon a number of vessels that were approaching the inlet.

It was near the sunset hour, and the fleet could not arrive until some hours after dark; but she felt no dread of them, for she had recognized, when the vessels first came in sight far up the coast, the flag-ship of her father's fleet, along with the two schooners which Colonel Rublo had fitted out to fall into their hands.

"My father has captured the other schooner," she said to Captain Duluth, who stood near her.

"And a large packet-ship, it seems," he said, referring to a large ship which formed one of the fleet of four vessels.

"She can never get into our harbor," remarked Lady Lulu, and thus the two, surrounded by three-score buccaneers, stood watching the approaching fleet.

Soon after dark shut them out of sight, but their lights were visible as they came on toward the channel.

An hour after nightfall a rocket suddenly soared upward from the deck of the brig.

"It is my father's signal," said Lady Lulu.

Soon after shots were heard inland, toward the prairie camp of Captain Bandera, and then hot and fast resounded the sound of conflict.

Lady Lulu was astounded, and called out:

"There is an attack upon us landward, and I had no warning that there was to be a move against us."

"It is well that my father arrives just as he does with the fleet."

For some moments the battle was hotly waged out upon the prairie beyond the everglades, and then silence followed.

Lady Lulu had at once dispatched a courier to the scene of conflict, but he did not return with any tidings, and she hurried down to meet her father at the landing, for the brig and one of the schooners had entered the basin behind the forts, and the other schooner had dropped anchor in the pass, while the large ship lay in the channel, having come as far as the depth of water would permit.

From each vessel boats were coming ashore, and, as Lady Lulu reached the landing she met, not her father but Neil Morgan.

As she started at sight of him, he said:

"Lady Lulu, be not alarmed for your safety, but your stronghold is in my power, as over five hundred men have landed, and resistance is utterly useless; but come, let me speak with you alone."

Lulu the Lioness had started at his words.

Instead of flying into a rage, as Neil Morgan had feared, she seemed cowed, and walked apart with him; while she asked in a low tone:

"Where is my father, señor?"

"Listen, and you shall hear all, Lady Lulu."

"To you I owe it, that I was not hanged by your father's command; but you put another in my place, took me on board of your *goleta*, and carried me to Vera Cruz, and, I would not have you think that I have returned good for evil, for I have felt that you were not one to lead this wild life, and I sought to free you from it."

"Through your aid my life was saved, and, after you left Vera Cruz, I met with one who nobly aided me, for learning my history, as I told it to him, he bade me follow his advice and become secretly a Mexican officer."

"Possessing vast influence, on account of his wealth, this friend told me how he intended fitting out a vessel to cruise against the pirates of the Gulf."

"At his own expense he was to do this, while the Mexican Government gave him a blank commission with the rank of a captain of the navy, which he was to fill up with the name of any officer he cared to appoint."

"He gave me that commission, and knowing that Colonel Rublo was to betray his Government, and give up the schooners to your father, I plotted to get possession of one of them to use as a vessel to cruise in."

"Knowing also, where Colonel Rublo had ordered the crews of the schooners, under pretense of having them taken on board, I went there, showed my commission, told them of the fate of the other schooners, and then set sail to hunt down the brig and the sister craft to my vessel."

"I at last found them, and the brig had captured a large English troop ship that had upon it some people whom I had known before."

"I fought the brig and the schooner, capturing both; but in the combat your father was slain."

"It is better so, than to be hanged," was the low, hoarse remark of Lady Lulu.

"True, and so thought I."

"I buried him at sea, with the other slain, and then I urged the commander of the troop ship to come hither with me, knowing that I could capture the stronghold by strategy, and place in his hands the vilest set of convicts that were ever herded together, and who were subjects of the British crown."

"He consented, and, above here on the coast, I landed the troopers, under a guide, and they attacked and took Bandera's camp, while I now have your stronghold."

"You, I wish to say, are free to go, and, in your *goleta* with your faithful peon crew, whom I know so well you can fully trust, I would advise that you set sail as soon as possible, taking with you what treasure you wish."

"Go where you please, and never let it be known that you were Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon."

"I shall go; but you?" she asked, in the same hoarse voice.

"Lady Lulu, I shall remain in the Mexican service, for in my own land I was never treated well."

"And Colonel Rublo?"

"I wished to save you from that man, for well I know that you do not love him."

"No, I love you," was the almost fierce reply.

"Yes, you have before told me that you honored me with your love, while I as frankly told you that I loved another."

"Then we must go different paths through life?"

"Yes, Lady Lulu."

"So be it; but Colonel Rublo?"

"I sail from here to Vera Cruz, and I shall arrest him, make his treachery known and leave him to the Government to deal with."

"It is better so; farewell."

She held forth her hand and grasped that of Neil Morgan.

A moment she stood thus, and then turned without another word and walked away.

Half an hour after the *goleta* was seen gliding out of the inlet and soon disappeared seaward.

Having made prisoners of all the outlaws, destroyed their stronghold, and put prize-crews on board their vessels, Captain Neil Morgan gave the signal to get under weigh, and shortly after sunrise the little fleet of the dead Corsair Commodore ran out of the inlet, and joining the troop ship, all spread sail and flew swiftly away over the waters of the Gulf.

Gaining an offing the troop ship headed along the coast, to round Yucatan and steer for her former destination, the island of Jamaica, while the fleet of smaller vessels put away for Vera Cruz.

Upon the deck of the brig, by the side of Neil Morgan, stood young Captain Ainsworth, he who had so gallantly led his men against the prairie fort of the pirates, and who was going to Vera Cruz with the convict commander, to ask of the Mexican Government the felon prisoners found among the lagoon outlaws.

"There is a wounded man, Señor Captain, who wishes to speak with you," said one of Neil Morgan's officers, approaching him as he stood talking with Captain Ainsworth.

The convict captain at once followed the offi-

cer forward and found there a man who had a fellow felon with him.

He had been wounded in the fight between the brig and the schooner, and had been steadily failing.

"Captain Morgan, I sent for you, sir, because I am dying," he said, in a low tone.

"Well, my poor man, is there aught that I can do for you?"

"No; but I can do something for you, and I will die easier."

"Is not Captain Ainsworth on board?"

"Yes, my man."

"Ask him to come here as a witness in your behalf."

In surprise Neil Morgan asked a man to fetch Captain Ainsworth, and when he had come the dying man said distinctly:

"Mr. Morgan, I was a wild youth, and unable to save money from my wages, and wishing to get married, I plotted a murder."

"I watched my chance, and soon it came about, for my employer went to town accompanied by his groom to get his rents, and I laid in wait for them and killed both."

"I saw some one coming through the forest and ran away before I got all the money, the groom having fallen some distance from his master."

"Those whom I killed were Lord Ravenal and his groom, and you were the one who frightened me away, and the murder was placed against you."

"I fled, but I got into other mischief and was thrown into prison, going out to the colonies a convict upon the same ship with you."

"Now you know, Captain Ainsworth, that Neil Morgan was innocent of the crime charged against him, for *I was the murderer!*"

Neil Morgan could not speak for full a moment, and then, as Captain Ainsworth grasped his hand, he cried, in a quivering voice:

"At last! at last!"

"My poor, poor Morgan! how you have suffered."

"But henceforth your life will be without a cloud," said Captain Ainsworth.

Bending over the dying convict, Neil Morgan thanked him in words of deep gratitude, and sat by his side until the spark of the murderer's life flickered out.

Arriving at Vera Cruz, Neil Morgan beheld there the *goleta* of Lady Lulu, and found the town greatly excited over the story that a beautiful Spanish lady had come there to dwell, had purchased an elegant house, and had surrounded herself with faithful peon servants.

This "Spanish lady" Neil Morgan knew to be Lady Lulu, and he hoped that in the gay life of the town she might be able to drown the sorrows called up by memories of her past.

Going to the quarters of Colonel Rublo, Neil Morgan found that arch traitor enjoying dinner with a party of friends.

The colonel sprang to his feet upon seeing his hated enemy enter, but in thunder tones came the words:

"Colonel Rublo, you are my prisoner, and I arrest you in the name of the Mexican Government, whose officer I am!"

"Never!" broke from the lips of the desperate man, and shortening his sword, he drove the blade into his heart ere any one present could prevent, and fell dead across the table, around which were gathered his friends.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCLUSION.

FOR his services in behalf of the Mexican Government, in capturing the fleet of the Corsair Commodore, and destroying his stronghold, Neil Morgan was decorated by the *junta* and made a senior captain in the navy.

The convict prisoners found among the pirates were turned over to Captain Ainsworth, who had them carried on board one of the schooners, which Captain Neil Morgan said should carry them to Jamaica, while he in his brig, when it had been refitted, should convey him there.

During the time the two vessels were fitting out for the cruise, Neil Morgan and Captain Ainsworth were the guests of Jacobs, the Jew.

Several weeks after, when they took their leave, the beautiful Adinah, knowing the hopelessness of winning the love of Neil Morgan, transferred her affection to the handsome young cavalryman, and he departed with the assurance from her that before many months had elapsed he could return to Vera Cruz and claim her as his bride.

And return he did, within the year; but not alone, for he came upon the Mexican brig-of-war, "The Lioness," Neil Morgan commander, and accompanying the Mexican captain was his beautiful wife, once known as Gulanare Ainsworth, and who had loved the man she married when he was a convict, though through all she had never believed him guilty.

The wedding of his daughter, Jacobs, the Jew, made a sensation of the day, and among the guests present was a beautiful creature, radiant with diamonds, who was known as a Spanish lady of fabulous wealth; but whom Neil Morgan would not betray as having once been Lady Lulu, the Lioness of the Lagoon.

THE END.

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